SEX, PLEASE, THEY'RE BRITISH
DAVID BROOKS

the weekly
Standard

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THE SELLING OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

by
LAWRENCE F. KAPLAN

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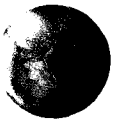
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Casual

My Detested Fellow Pilgrims

"Christ," thinks the wife of Harry Morgan, the hero of Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not*, "I could do that all night if a man was built that way." But, of course, a man isn't. Men aren't built other ways as well. "Men don't like complicated food," says one spinsterish character to another in a Barbara Pym novel.

I would like to add another male deficiency. With the exception of those who make their living in and around the places, men don't have much museum stamina—the ability to spend hours contemplating works of art, even the greatest works of art, with anything like the same concentration women seem able to bring to the job.

I base my opinion on a by-no-means random opinion sample: my wife and I. My wife can, in the museological equivalent of Mrs. Harry Morgan's sentiment, go all night. And I? I have just returned from a week in England, where I visited only two museums: the Courtauld in London and the Fitzwilliam in Cambridge. Both have what I think it fair to call small but select collections of painting and sculpture and art objects. Yet in both places I felt my attention wandering. I longed for fresh air. Surrounded by grand works of art, I nonetheless wished to be—elsewhere. I used to say that my museum stamina extended to roughly 90 minutes. I fear it is now under an hour, and shrinking.

The energy for the acquisition of culture seems to be diminishing in me. I used to want to read—and, truth be known, own—all the world's excellent books. This desire has departed, sent packing by the realization that it can't be done. I don't care enough about opera to want to see all the world's operas, though I continue to want to hear as much serious music as possible. I once thought I wanted to see all the world's—or at least all the Western world's—great paintings and sculpture, and I still do, but I shall evidently have to do so in half-hour sessions.

The slightly alarming thought occurs to me that I may already have seen too much art, and thus have become, without my quite knowing it, jaded. Owing to the ease of contemporary travel as well as to the ingenuity of contemporary curators in putting together "super" shows, I have doubtless seen ten times the art that a man of my equivalent level of culture was able to see a century ago.

A few months ago I was in a Park Avenue penthouse once owned by Helena Rubinstein, whose walls were all but papered with Renoirs and other paintings, so little space was there between works. I found myself deeply unmoved and greatly unimpressed. If you have seen one Renoir, as the late and not-too-soon forgotten Spiro Agnew said about slums, you have seen them all. Or so I concluded, as I plowed into my dessert, oblivious to the art all around me. Let the Renoirs go hang, I said to myself, which was what they were already doing. As I say, jaded.

This past summer I was in Philadelphia and went to the Barnes Foundation, a peculiar museum out on the Main Line. The brilliant accumulation of a most eccentric man, a physician who made his fortune selling an antiseptic called Argyrol, the Barnes Foundation contains 60 Matisses, 69 Cézannes, and 180 Renoirs, and much else that seemed to me dazzling, all mounted in the most higgledy-piggledy fashion. Taken together, it was as pleasing a museum experience as I have had in recent years, though the rooms were awash with art gobblers such as myself.

A break for lunch, then on to the super Cézanne show at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. I had written away for tickets months before. When I arrived, vast lines had already formed, and I joined what Henry James, in a not dissimilar situation, once called "my detested fellow pilgrims." (Since I first encountered it, I have found the phrase immensely useful for dealing with the problem of tourism and snobbery, or the dislike for people who are all too identical in their interest to you: that they are fellow pilgrims doesn't mean you can't detest them.) Although the Cézanne paintings were splendid, the crowd wasn't, and my stamina, after my session at Dr. Barnes's joint in the morning, was at low ebb. I had, clearly, over-arted myself.

In viewing art, it may be that less is more. It may be, too, that I have to put myself on an art diet. No more super shows; no attempts to do large museums in one fell, or even a triple fell, swoop. Abstinence may be required.

Perhaps a year's lay-off would be helpful. After that I might be able once again to view a Gauguin or a Chagall or a Picasso as something more than very costly wallpaper, which is what these artists' paintings have pretty much become for me. A year off—who can say?—might remove the pink from the cheeks of all those Renoir ladies and put it back in my own.

Joseph Epstein

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the weekly Standard

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The Audit Bureau Member

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The Poll Numbers on China: 61-29 Against

The Washington debate over the Clinton administration's policy of appeasement—pardon us, "engagement"—toward China is heating up. It will get even warmer as July 1 nears, when Hong Kong reverts to Chinese sovereignty after 155 years as a British crown colony. And there'll be a full boil when Congress takes up the question of China's "most favored nation" status in American trade law. The fearsome let's-trade-with-Beijing lobby will twist the arms of congressmen to shut up about human rights and pass MFN. Wavering legislators will want to know: Where's the public on this nettlesome issue? Here's the answer.

At The Weekly Standard's request, the polling firm Public Opinion Strategies earlier this month reminded 800 Americans that the MFN designation "gives the Chinese full trading privileges with the United States." Then our pollsters posed a question that, if anything, bends over backwards in favor of engagement.

Some people support MFN "because they believe it will promote democracy and free markets in China and help the U.S. economy." Others want to suspend MFN "because China limits human rights, sells arms to Iran and pursues an aggressive foreign policy." So do our poll respondents "support or oppose continuing most favored nation status with China?"

The result: The American people oppose MFN, overwhelmingly, by 61 to 29 percent (the other 10 percent don't know or gave no answer). They oppose it in every region of the country. They oppose it in the cities. They oppose it in the suburbs. They oppose it on the farm. White people oppose it. Black people oppose it. Republicans oppose it. Democrats oppose it. Rich people oppose it. Poor people oppose it. High-school dropouts oppose it. Ph.D.s oppose it. Married people oppose it. Single people oppose it. Clinton voters oppose it. Dole voters oppose it. Perot voters oppose it.

In other words, everyone opposes MFN. And interestingly enough, no one opposes MFN more than women do: by a whopping 45-point margin, 67 to 22 percent. So on this issue, President Clinton has a gender gap. He deserves it.

Greeting the Dalai Lama

Speaking of China, no instance of Beijing's brutality is more striking than its oppression of the Tibetan people. The depth of Chinese Communist hatred for the Dalai Lama—spiritual leader of that captive nation and of millions of Buddhists around the world—can be gauged by the virulence of Beijing's propaganda. Xinhua, the Chinese "news service," last year described the 1989 winner of the Nobel peace prize as an "executioner with honey on his lips and murder in his heart" who used "30 human heads and 80 portions of human blood and flesh each year as sacrificial offerings when he held a religious service in India to curse the People's Liberation war."

The depth of America's kowtowing to Beijing will be gauged by the reception extended to the Dalai Lama, who is in Washington for three days this week. Friends of Tibet have urged President Clinton to meet with the Dalai Lama in the Oval Office and hope the Tibetan leader will be invited to address a joint session of Congress, following in the footsteps of such previous Nobel laureates as Nelson Mandela and Lech Walesa. The Chinese government has let Washington officials know that it would disapprove of any such gesture.

The (Further) Descent of Wanniski

Jude Wanniski's crackpot crusade to launder the reputation of Louis Farrakhan proceeds apace. Wanniski, once an influential publicist for supply-side economics and a top adviser to Jack Kemp as recently as last fall, apparently devotes an increasing amount of his time to advising Farrakhan on his TV talk-show appearances. Here are excerpts from a "memo to Tim Russert" that Wanniski posted last week on his Internet home page, after Farrakhan appeared on *Meet the Press*:

> I thought the interview went very well, displaying a lot of information about Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam that your broad audience had not been aware of. I told him after the show that it would cause a lot of confusion to the conventional wisdom. Leonard Muhammad [a Farrakhan deputy] called from London and said there had been an agreement not to use old film clips, but I

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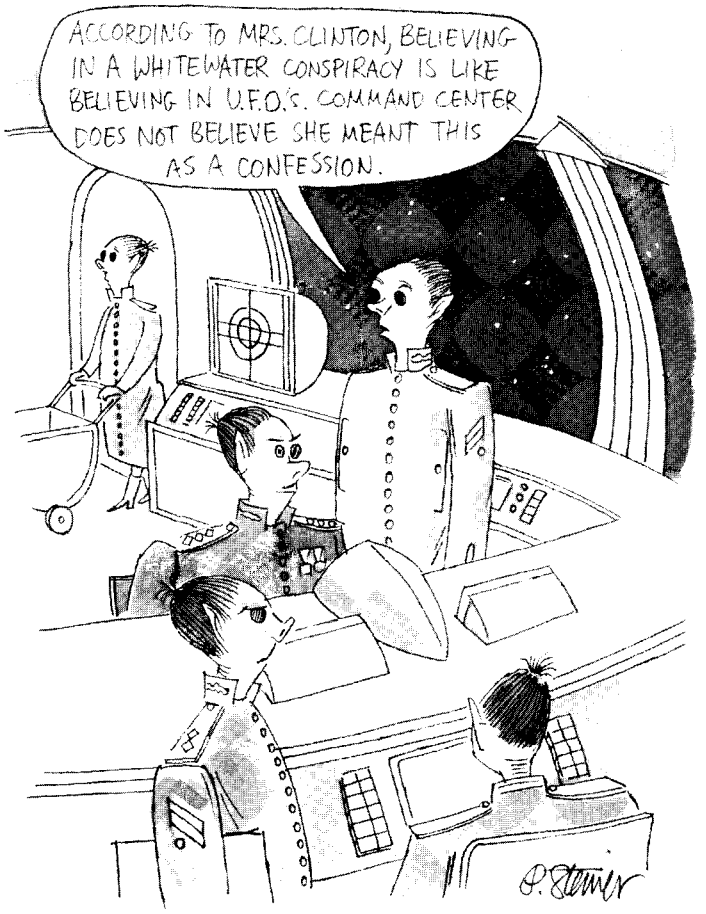

told him the clip you used was useful, in that it cast Min. Farrakhan in the light I have come to know him, as a populist. When he was asked if he believed there had been a holocaust, he looked startled at the question, especially after your film clips showed him in '95 tearing into the Wall Street Jews for having financed Nazi Germany and the extermination of the Little Jews. . . . I've told Farrakhan that at the moment he is the only Truthteller in our country.

To paraphrase a famous humor columnist: We're not making this up.

The Arts Machine

First it tried the Alec Baldwin gambit—send Hollywood stars to Capitol Hill to do grip 'n' grins with hostile lawmakers. Now the National Endowment for the Arts is stepping up its campaign for survival. With its latest round of grants earlier this month, the NEA has cleverly dropped its open support of the bizarre pornographic works that made it notorious. Instead, the NEA is transforming itself into a full-time social-work agency, just out to do a few good deeds.

Typical of the new NEA are grants like the $20,000 to the Los Angeles Poverty Department. No, it's not a soup kitchen. This LAPD is a theater troupe for the homeless, who, absent the support of the NEA, would no doubt be simply panhandlers, instead of panhandlers who tread the boards.

Worried about AIDS? So is the National Endowment for the Arts, which is giving Concerned Citizens for Humanity of Hartford, Connecticut $75,000 for STOPAIDS, "a statewide design project tailored to educate at-risk youth and persons with hearing disabilities on the problem of HIV/AIDS."

And if you thought we were getting too harsh on illegal immigrants, the NEA has a way to smooth over our differences. At the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, U.S. Latino and Mexican-borderland artists will be collaborating on a series of performances called "Gateways: New Creative Collaborations with Mexico." The price of the gateways: $125,000.

Maybe next time, they'll cut out the middleman and just give grants to congressmen directly.

Correction

Tod Lindberg writes: I want to correct an error in my article on Richard Ben-Veniste in last week's issue. I noted that the first time the name of John Huang—the Lippo Group official turned Commerce Department official turned DNC fund-raiser—came up in an investigative context was at a June 8, 1996, deposition of Bruce Lindsey before Senate Whitewater committee lawyers. That was correct. But Lindsey did not, as I wrote, testify that he had discussed former Justice Department official Webster Hubbell with Huang. Instead, Lindsey was responding to a question about whom he had spoken with from the Lippo Group since the beginning of the Clinton administration.

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Oslo Matters

Despite Charles Krauthammer's reputation, his article "Oslo Is Dead" (April 14) is deeply flawed. Oslo, *when completed, necessarily means the* end of the Palestinian Charter calling for the destruction of Israel. Obviously peace and the Charter cannot co-exist, and Oslo cannot be fulfilled without the termination of the Charter.

Palestinian intransigence on the termination of the Charter is clearly a counterpoise to Israel's intransigence on an undivided Jerusalem. A breakthrough on the latter is indispensable to a breakthrough in the peace movement. This is the issue, not borders affecting what Krauthammer describes as "uninhabited territories."

Ultimately, Israel and its Arab neighbors must join together under the peace movement. Otherwise all parties involved will disintegrate as war-torn, backward, economically retarded nations.

MAURICE ROSENFIELD
CHICAGO, IL

Thank you for publishing "Oslo Is Dead." Charles Krauthammer is one who sees clearly and is blessed with the ability to communicate. Please keep publishing his views. Maybe someday when this country comes to its senses, Krauthammer will be the opinion-shaper and the world will be a better place.

JUDITH SILBER
CHICAGO, IL

Charles Krauthammer, the Likud apologist, is being demagogic again. His article is arrant propaganda. Meanwhile, it lowers the standards of your magazine to carry such an obvious polemic. Henceforth you should be known as "The Weekly Substandard."

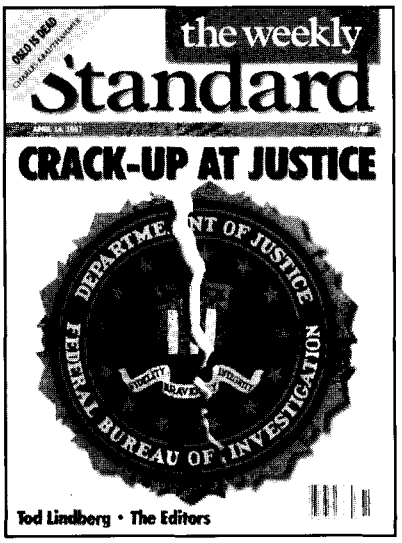
W.H. RIDDELL
TAMPA, FL

Kiddie-porn Prisons

Tod Lindberg's "Unmolested Molesters" (April 14) was almost hysterical. Does Lindberg want 4,000 people sent to prison for upwards of 20 years (at an expense to the taxpayer of at least $40,000 a year per inmate plus litigation costs) for the possession of one digitally transmitted image?

THE WEEKLY STANDARD should publish an exposé on how the law defines child pornography to see if anyone is safe. Under the law, if Michelangelo were working today, he could be sent to jail for using a 15-year-old nude male model for his David sculpture. Indeed, parents taking nude pictures of their own children have been arrested under the law.

FORREST P. CLAY
NORFOLK, VA



Artists and the Elites

I take issue with two recent articles by Jay Nordlinger: "The Cecilia Bartoli Claque" (March 31) and "The Assault on David Helfgott" (April 14).

The biography of Bartoli is indeed fawning and ridiculous, but Bartoli's fans are not pathetic. Cecilia Bartoli is a remarkably talented and charming performer. According to Nordlinger, Bartoli is "frightfully undisciplined and libertine." Oh, please! Her sparkling delivery brings to life beautiful old music that otherwise might go unheard.

Ironically, the profoundly disturbed and cruelly exploited David Helfgott fares far better under Nordlinger's pen. Music critics have been unanimous in their condemnation of those who would parade such a pitiable man before huge audiences, and rightly so. Nordlinger chides those "elites" who "balk at the introduction of high art into popular culture, where distortion and degradation lie in wait." Those elites have a good point, and they are a lot more impressed with the talents of Cecilia Bartoli than the sad spectacle of David Helfgott.

MICHAEL F. BISHOP
ALEXANDRIA, VA

After reading Jay Nordlinger's piece on David Helfgott, I remembered the antics of Oscar Levant. He was out of control at times, but no one whom I know of ever accused him of being a lousy piano player. His sarcasm and demeaning wit were a drawing card. At the height of his fame, he was a showman first, musician second. But he sure could pack a house.

Likewise, David Helfgott is showtime. What is wrong with that? People like the music he provides, and they like him. Let him do what he is doing well: giving us Bubbas and tin ears something to do besides watching *Beverly Hillbillies* reruns. Page, Swed, and all the rest of the snotty highbrows can go soak their heads!

DANIEL H. FRAZIER
ST. MARKS, FL

Congressional Quotas

John Barnes's "Quota Hires in Blue" (April 14) continues THE WEEKLY STANDARD's tradition of stimulating reporting. Yet I take issue with his appeal to Congress for action.

Barnes's prayer to Congress is followed by his correct analysis that if Congress does nothing it will be "buying quota hiring." Well, Congress has already bought quota hiring.

In its rush to adjourn in the fall of 1996, Congress reauthorized legislation dealing with airport improvement. This airport program mandated that, at a minimum, 10 percent of airport operations have to go to companies owned by women or minorities.

MICHAEL J. SHEBER
MONTEREY, MA

Close the Masochist Café

Regarding "Springtime in the Masochist Café, or, The Revolt Against Self-Esteem" (April 7):

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Though I agree with David Brooks that masochist chic is rebellion against the self-esteem movement, I believe it is a pathology of even more disturbing trends. As the father of a 14-year-old daughter, I see these trends playing out on a daily basis.

The trend toward androgynous anhedonia has been helped by peer pressure. When 53 percent of America's teenagers cite "the need to belong" as the reason why people join gangs, one sees how the need to look like everyone else influences the way they dress. Unfortunately, most teenagers are unable to heed Goethe's advice to "trust yourself [to] know how to live."

A lack of relationship with the Divine has also influenced this state. Listen to Leo Tolstoy: "Complete unity with the highest and most perfect reason and, thereby, perfect well-being is an ideal toward which humanity strives. But, when reason diverges from its own particular function (the clarification of the relationship with God and the activities that conform to it), and is directed not only at service to the flesh, or bitter strife with other men and other creatures, but also at justifying this evil existence, so contrary to man's nature and purpose, then these dreadful misfortunes occur from which the majority of today's people are suffering. More over, a situation then arises whereby it is almost impossible to return to a reasonable, decent life."

Last, an overemphasis on egalitarianism contributes to the problem. Our youth scorn meaningful distinction as a result of the aggressive drive for political correctness.

WILLIAM NIXON
ALEXANDRIA, VA

DREYFUSS FOR GREATNESS

I am writing to vigorously applaud David Brooks's "A Return to National Greatness" (March 3). A sense that the future was ours was the most common conviction in the American experience. That mindset has been replaced with uncertainty, doubt, and a smallness of imagination. It is loathsome, this paucity of belief and self-regard that has overtaken us.

I offer this idea: Why not another World's Fair? In the past, a World's Fair defined our future hopes, not our futures. The messages were muscular and vivid, yet unintentional and subtextual. Could there be value in the effort and achievement of a true World's Fair, focusing the national attention, establishing a new goal, and helping us to define more clearly the next era in our story? Would such an effort necessarily be drowned under thoughtless consumerism or suffocating political correctness? Couldn't the interests of the business, science, and academic communities find common ground, with techies and media types and artists?

Regarding Brooks's wonderful article, I offer two points on which we disagree. He refers to the civil rights era in the following manner: "What had been a great national crusade for justice evolved into a series of petty squabbles over spoils." Was the Right at that time in agreement that the civil rights struggle was a "great national crusade"? Perhaps some conservative intellectuals said so at the time, but my memory tells me that they were not heard above the din equating change with communism.

Second, Brooks writes: "Worse, under the influence of the New Left . . . at a time when a teenager's haircut was a political statement to be adjudicated by the Supreme Court, all the issues of the private realm, smoking, methods of raising children, sexual preferences, began to overshadow the traditional subjects like order, justice, and the distribution of wealth."

It's the "worse" with which I argue. The implication is that the Left did something fundamentally wrong and damaging to the nation. But these were issues of law and justice. These cases sought to answer the questions of how we were to live together under law while the perception of justice was changing, the franchise was enlarging, and the new realities of drugs and technology were dragging us into a new world. It's true that both sides, both ways of looking at the world, were struggling with new definitions and demands. Both were less evil than the other perceived, and both were so mulish as to make agreement with articles such as Brooks's more and more impossible. It's also true that mulishness has been so stubbornly maintained that it has increasingly affected our ability and willingness to share the nation's civic space. But I wholeheartedly agree with the substance and tone of Brooks's piece, and have spoken to this point for the past six years. Again, I truly loved this article.

RICHARD DREYFUSS
WEST HOLLYWOOD, CA

BASEBALL IS BACK—AGAIN

The baseball season has begun, but Fred Barnes remains sadly off-base with his claim that "baseball is a liberal sport, so boring it's adored by liberals" ("My Sports, Right or Left," Jan. 27).

Baseball is an American tradition, thus a conservative sport. Its history is essentially coterminous with that of the American Republic. Its legends and lore are part of the fabric of the nation itself, and its evolution has been slow and organic—all of which speaks for the conservative nature of the game.

Despite baseball's problems at the major-league level, the game continues to exert a powerful hold on the American people. Minor-league teams are thriving. More people watch baseball games than any other sport. More people play the game (counting softball, its close relative) than any other sport. Baseball and softball are games of choice at neighborhood picnics, church socials, and family reunions. And, as far as we know, families, neighborhoods, and churches are conservative institutions.

Ronald Reagan got his start as a baseball announcer. Rush Limbaugh worked for the Kansas City Royals. George Will and Tom Clancy are baseball fanatics and part owners of the Baltimore Orioles.

Fred, it's time to take yourself out to the ballgame.

JIM ROBERTS
WASHINGTON, DC

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the weekly Standard

PHILLY PHANATICS

In the United States, "there is hardly any talk of the beauty of virtue," Tocqueville noted. "American moralists do not pretend that one must sacrifice himself for his fellows because it is a fine thing to do so." They are "forever forming" associations "of a thousand different types" all by themselves, unprompted. They "found seminaries, build churches, distribute books, and send missionaries." Their "hospitals, prisons, and schools take shape in that way." And all the while, Americans modestly "prefer to give credit to their philosophy rather than to themselves."

Tocqueville admired us for this. But that was in the 1830s, when Andrew Jackson was president. His contemporary successor, William Jefferson Clinton, is a man to whom consistent philosophy is an irritating "false choice," a man who prefers instead that credit for the beauty of civic virtue be conferred individually. On him, whenever possible. Such as next week in Philadelphia, when the "Presidents' Summit for America's Future" convenes.

The summit is billed as the "historic" inauguration of a mass, communal effort to care for, protect, and "mentor" children—a great awakening of adult obligation President Clinton says "every American should embrace." To infuse the rest of us with such selflessness, all the nation's biggest selves will be on hand. Colin Powell is "general chairman." Bill Bradley was originally tapped to be vice chairman, but Al Gore reportedly threw a fit when he heard the plan—Bradley may run against him in 2000—and Bradley got dumped. White House chief of staff Erskine Bowles swears this story is false. The White House simply "wanted a high-profile Hispanic in that position," he explains, so they got former housing secretary Henry Cisneros.

Joining them as mistress of ceremonies will be Oprah Winfrey: "producer, philanthropist, businesswoman, and child advocate." There's talk that Travolta and Cosby and Barbra and Arnold may make the scene. Floating somewhere in the soup will be delegates who "look like the community," so long as you understand "community" primarily to comprise multi-million-dollar mega-charities, large corporations, unions, "educators," national church associations, and former presidents Bush, Carter, and Ford. Those few of these delegates who have real-world volunteer experience will feel lonely among the celebrities and the thousand-plus credentialed media.

And what will they all *do*? Not much. They will share the latest scientific discoveries about how to be an attentive, non-abusive grownup. They will discuss post-summit "follow-through"—which appears mostly to involve cloning the event in each of the 50 states. And they will bask in an aura of turbo-charged piety. In the creation of which no expense has been spared.

Sunday, Philadelphians will be bribed with free food to serve as stage extras for Bill, Hillary, Tipper, and Al, who will be cleaning up graffiti on Germantown Avenue. It has nothing to do with "children," of course, but it makes for a terrific photo. Monday and Tuesday's public events are two ceremonies on the steps of Independence Hall. "It's such an important site and such a spectacular visual," one summit insider points out. "If it rains and you take it inside, you lose all the special qualities." Can't have that; altruism must be televised. So they may put up a lighted tent over the entire two-story building, including the spire. Supervising such details is legendary image-meister Michael Deaver, who has hired consultants to design the summit's logo, and "focus groups that mall-test key words to see which ones grab people's attention." Not to worry: Deaver's firm is billing its services at a 20 percent discount.

Mind, you are not allowed to be cynical about all this vulgarity. *Newsweek*'s Jonathan Alter celebrates the summit by invoking the idealism that "lurks, somewhere, in all good journalists." Skepticism is well and good, he avers. But this time we must write "better stories, in a better country." On the other side of the ideological divide, conservative pundit Arianna Huffington scores the media for thus far ignoring an event "predicated on waking up the better angels of our nature." Blindness to the urgency of the Philadelphia summit, she says, reflects an "insulated middle-class indifference so blatant that it borders on the obscene."

There's something weird about the press disarming itself this way and fashioning a cult of sincerity around an event that hasn't yet occurred. Especially one this incoherent.

The summit's organizers cannot even agree among themselves about their purpose. Philadelphia is meant

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to "crack the atom of civic indifference" in America, announces Harris Wofford of Clinton's Corporation for National Service. But there is no such indifference, suggests the summit's official propaganda; the delegates will build on a "current wave of community and neighborhood-based innovation." What do we call this innovation? Voluntarism "is the right word for it," says Bob Goodwin of the Points of Light Foundation. No, it's not, replies Wofford; voluntarism is "people doing good things but not actually solving problems." And who must solve these problems? Depends on whom you talk to. "Much of the work of America cannot be done by government," says President Clinton of the summit. But that work cannot be done *without* government, says General Powell, and his project "is no replacement."

Despite the confusion, there *is* an idea underlying the coming spectacle in Philadelphia: the idea implied by Hillary Clinton's famous remark that "there is no such thing as other people's children." It is the idea that private and public responsibilities are inseparable, that we can't distinguish appropriate roles for government and the rest of society, that everyone must do everything for everyone else. And that politics, as commonly understood, is therefore impossible. This is the one thing about which the Philadelphia summiteers are unanimous. It is not a "bipartisan" event. It is not even "nonpartisan." It has—General Powell, again—"*nothing* to do with politics."

Too bad. When public men deprecate their public duties they throw away the one real and practical means they have to inspire precisely the community spirit they all vow to seek in Philadelphia. In free political debate, Tocqueville observed, "men combine for great ends," which gives them a "lesson in the value of helping one another even in lesser affairs." Once drawn out of their own lives by politics, "they always know how to meet again." And they "carry these assumptions with them into the affairs of civil life and put them to a thousand uses."

In short, the best way for government to encourage voluntarism is to butt out of civil life and get on with its own distinct, important, and (indirectly) voluntarism-inspiring business. The nation will get something close to an opposite message from next week's glitzy pageant in Philadelphia. But since it's primarily glitz, it probably won't do too much damage.

—David Tell, for the Editors

The Seduction of Lott

by Fred Barnes

The Clinton White House thinks it has lured Senate majority leader Trent Lott into supporting the chemical-weapons ban. The tactic: engaging in extensive negotiations with Lott over Senate modifications of the treaty. By making concessions to Lott—and to Sen. Jesse Helms, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee—President Clinton's aides believe they've given Lott a stake in the treaty. At least they figure they've put him in a position where blocking the pact would be awkward and perhaps politically damaging. (Helms is another story.) To keep Lott mollified, Clinton aides have also lovebombed him. Robert Bell of the National Security Council thanked Lott publicly for his cooperation in adding conditions to the treaty and called him "a very tough negotiator." Even Lott's staffer, Randy Scheunemann, was lauded by Bell.

For a while, it appeared the White House was right about Lott. When conservative leader Paul Weyrich warned him against playing the facilitator role for the Chemical Weapons Convention that Howard Baker played in the passage of the Panama Canal treaties two decades ago, Lott scoffed. Weyrich's point was that Baker's presidential chances were hurt, while those of Ronald Reagan, who opposed the treaties, were enhanced. And Lott later reacted irritably to a lobbying effort by several dozen conservatives, including treaty critic Frank Gaffney. Lott also pleased the White House by insisting the treaty be voted on by April 29, the date it goes into effect worldwide, and not be bottled up in Helms's committee. Republican senators worried he was preparing to vote for the treaty or let it pass while quietly voting no. "He's been trying to play this too cute," complains Sen. Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania, a Lott ally, by seeking to satisfy both Clinton and his Senate colleagues.

Pressured by Santorum and other senators, Lott has changed his tune. "Right now," he told Chris Matthews on CNBC on April 15, "the form this treaty is in, even with the conditionalities that have been agreed to . . . is not in our best interest, and I will be opposed to it." Lott said his biggest concern was the "sharing" provision, which is supposed to give countries access to all permissible chemicals and chemical technology. "I'm concerned that some of the people like Iran that may be a part of this treaty [will] use it to get more chemical-weapons information and more information about how to deal with defensive activi-

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ties. These are major flaws with this treaty. If those could be and are addressed, I'll vote for it. If they're not, I will vote against it, and I will speak against it, and I will fight it."

The White House offered more concessions the next day, notably one on sharing. Major chemical-manufacturing countries, collectively known as the Australia Group, would not be required to weaken their export controls under the treaty, according to a new modification. They could still deny Iran or anyone else access to "dual-use chemicals" that might be used to produce weapons of mass destruction. All 30 countries in the Australia Group declared, at the Clinton administration's instigation, that they would maintain the controls. Besides, a White House official said, the provision granting full exchange of chemicals among treaty-signing countries was innocuous boilerplate and non-binding. "You've got to throw a bone to countries who didn't get everything they wanted in the treaty," the official said.

Lott was not visibly impressed. For one thing, there was the question of China, not a member of the Australia Group but a chemical exporter. If China sold chemicals that could be used militarily, wouldn't France and other countries join in? Lott was said to think so. And what about changes in governments, bringing in officials who hadn't promised to maintain export controls? And what about the exchange of defensive technology, which the treaty promotes? Wouldn't that lead to "reverse engineering," which makes it possible for rogue countries like Iran to concoct ways to evade America's chemical defenses? These questions will have to be dealt with adequately to get Lott's support, or at least keep him from leading the fight against the treaty.

That creates a problem. The White House has already made so many concessions—including ones to Lott easing the ban on tear gas and forcing foreign inspectors to get warrants from American judges to search American chemical plants—that any more might vitiate the treaty. "We've pushed the envelope as far as it can go without renegotiating the treaty," says a Senate aide. Renegotiation, especially of the sharing provision, is exactly what Helms wants. It would, of course, kill American participation in the treaty for now. Before agreeing to that, the White House would

"Why does the United States have a quota limiting imports of sugar?"

In most foreign countries sugar production is heavily subsidized therefore removing any possibility of financial loss.

With the subsidy in hand, the foreign farmers and governments "dump" their surplus sugar supply at below their production costs on the world market.

The quota basically protects the American Sugar farmers from the unfair competition of heavily subsidized foreign sugar farmers. It is a system that levels the playing field.

FLOSUN SUGAR

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probably yank the treaty from Senate consideration, as it did last September. Clinton doesn't relish this. But his leverage with Lott is diminished. "I've stuck my neck out [for the president] on a couple issues and basically wound up with an empty bag," Lott says. This time, the man with the empty bag may be Clinton.

Fred Barnes is executive editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

SELLING ELLEN OUT

by Matt Labash

MAYBE YOU'VE HEARD. Ellen DeGeneres, the sitcom actress, and Ellen Morgan, her TV character (from the aptly titled sitcom, *Ellen*), are coming out, bless them. It seems like only yesterday I was recounting to a colleague how a month had passed since the announcement that Ellen (the character, not the actress) would be revealed as a lesbian. But that was last year. And now here we are, eight months after word of the plan first appeared in *TV Guide*, two months after it became a definite go, and two weeks after Ellen (the actress, not the character) turned Henry Luce's weekly diary of the American Century into a lesboerotic fanzine ("Yep, I'm Gay" read *Time*'s cover line). And we're *still* a week away from the "very special" *Ellen* (the show, not the character) in which the closet door is opened.

Exploitative? A self-conscious campaign to get attention for a middling show on a network with a prime-time schedule in critical condition? Never mind that cicadas and liver spots have come out faster than Ellen, Ellen, or *Ellen*. The pundits have already determined that DeGeneres is a "gay Jackie Robinson" (*Miami Herald*) achieving an "important milestone for television" while providing an "important eye-opener for mainstream America" (*Denver Post*) as she reaches a "personal and social landmark" (*Detroit News*).

"It's been great publicity for a show that was not going to make it," says Allen Banks, media director of Saatchi & Saatchi. "They strategically milked it for all it's worth. It was brilliant, and I congratulate them."

"They" are the publicity apparatchiks who have sold not only the coming-out itself, but also the coming-out story behind the coming-out—a tale of the trepidation and bravery it took for everyone involved over a matter of many months. Almost every major advance in this story has somehow mysteriously "leaked." Which is to say, somebody leaked it. Who? Hard to tell, because there are so many authorized leakers. There is one publicity firm, PMK, that represents Ellen the Actress's emergence; PMK is to publicity what Disney is to amusement parks in Florida. And speaking of Disney, it produces *Ellen* and has an army of PR people. Not to mention ABC, the network that runs *Ellen*, and *its* PR department. (Disney, of course, now owns ABC, so both are handling the emergence of Ellen the Character).

There is so much publicity afoot, in fact, that the publicists are getting reverse publicity! *Newsweek* reported that network publicist Jill Lessard "came out" on the set after "getting swept up in the moment." According to Lessard, her tale hit print because Ellen the Actress told Chastity Bono the Lesbian Daughter of Sonny who told *Newsweek* who called Lessard who confirmed it.

The publicity factions have occasionally worked at cross purposes. One ABC source, miffed that PMK is limiting access to Ellen, says that *Time* locked up the "exclusive" of Ellen the Actress's outing after PMK shopped it to both *Time* and *Newsweek* before wrangling a guarantee from *Time* that it would make the cover.

Newsweek sources confirm this (as one might expect them to), but *Time* managing editor Walter Isaacson vehemently denies it as preposterous (as one might expect him to). "I promise you, it ain't true," Isaacson says. Faced with the daunting prospect of making "Antarctica's Secrets" or "The Backlash Against HMOs" the cover that week, Isaacson says it was a last-minute decision based on consensus "except for the guy who wrote the Antarctica piece." And besides, "The news is that it's a cultural milestone, and the person at the heart of it explains her thinking." No matter that Ellen the Actress's emergence is news to very few, as her inclination has been an open secret for years.

But this flowering is in fact historic for another reason: The protracted outing has been one of the most cynical marketing ploys in the history of the medium.

The truth that the publicity ruses obfuscate is that, sexuality aside, *Ellen* is a *bad show*—and has consistently "underperformed," as the networks say, in a strong time slot. It was artistically weak when it debuted in March 1994 as *These Friends of Mine*—

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though it was briefly in the top 10, slotted in the downdraft of the top-rated *Roseanne*. And the show got even messier after changing its name to *Ellen* in the next season, going through three sets of producers, and experiencing numerous cast purges in search of a chemistry that still has not crystallized.

Consequently, *Ellen* found itself in 39th place last season. So it was no big surprise to discover in September that Ellen the Character was likely going gay. As *Entertainment Weekly* later pointed out, the "leak" coincided almost precisely with *Ellen*'s season premiere—and even so, viewership dropped 15 percent from the season before. ABC and Disney sounded tentative about the show's prospective direction, though the network's advance PR blurb on the new season was that Ellen would be taking a "radical new path" to "self-discovery and fulfillment."

Indeed, *Entertainment Weekly*'s A.J. Jacobs says DeGeneres told him and another writer in July, two months before the *TV Guide* story, that her character was "going to go on a journey"—and she didn't mean to Katmandu.

While the riskiness of such a bold programming decision has been trumpeted in nearly every feature, *Ellen*'s dual outings posed little risk at all. Syndication rights had already been sold for a record $600,000 per episode to Lifetime, a cable network "for women" desperate for TV shows about women. An *Entertainment Weekly* poll early on showed that 72 percent of the population "would not be offended if a lead character were gay."

Ellen the Actress has received nothing but adulation every step of the way. Last fall, she made coy appearances on *Letterman*, *Rosie O'Donnell*, and other shows where she repeated the trope that her "character finds out she's Lebanese." She popped up at numerous gay activist events, like an awards ceremony where she nearly sucked out k.d. lang's wisdom teeth with a kiss at the podium.

Despite the feeding frenzy, *Ellen* was still stomped like a throw rug by *The Nanny* until it was moved to a new time slot in December. Though ABC wouldn't publicly commit to going lesbian, all kinds of background sources began turning up in stories around the same time informing us that *Ellen* would now be appearing later in the evening because that would be a

"At any point should the US Sugar program be terminated?"

FLOSUN SUGAR

Yes.

As soon as the foreign governments stop subsidizing their sugar farmers, then there will no longer be a need for the US Sugar policy.

With a level playing field, the ingenuity and work ethic of the US Sugar Farmer would prevail.

As long as foreign governments continue to heavily subsidize their sugar farmers, the US Sugar policy is needed for the protection of US Sugar farmers.

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more appropriate time for an outing.

All the while, ABC and the allegedly hyperconscientious, family-centric Disney kept the seduction going by making sure everybody knew Ellen's change in orientation might *not* happen. Disney was cast as bad cop on the gay beat, even though it is the same company that released *Kids* and *Priest*, conducted "Gay Day" at Disney World, and extended benefits to the same-sex partners of its employees.

The three-headed publicity monster has regularly leaked scripts (though they claimed they were guarding against such activity), rolled out selected "exclusives," and manufactured controversy. While the media have dutifully reported two or three advertisers' balking at this episode, *Business Week* has been alone in reporting not only that the show is a sellout, but that 30-second spots are going for 20 percent over *Ellen*'s usual $170,000 rate.

And why is there no controversy? Where are the boycotts, the preachers, the protests? True, Jerry Falwell has called DeGeneres "Ellen Degenerate," but otherwise. . . . "We have nothing to say on the matter," said a Christian Coalition spokesman. After numerous calls, even the Rev. Donald Wildmon, who made *NYPD Blue* a household name with a months-long protest that helped catapult the show into the top 10, wasn't available to serve up any red meat.

When Ellen finally opens the closet door next week, Matt, the gay character on *Melrose Place*, will have been trying for six years to get something more than his hair tousled by boyfriends. If TV really wants to be courageous, let's see Jerry and George from *Seinfeld* in a moment of tenderness. Or the duo from *Men Behaving Badly*. It is, of course, a lesser gamble to feature a lesbian lead, since many a straight male viewer can appreciate and even enthuse over the coupling of *two* objects of desire, without some hairy beast casting a shadow.

Howard Stern, that great cultivator of the grunt-mass palate, has a succinct formula for entertainment success: "Lesbians, Lesbians, Lesbians." And there are television precedents for the assured success of lesbian interplay. The kiss between Amanda Donahoe and Michele Greene on *L.A. Law* in 1991 spiked the ratings. So did the Mariel Hemingway-Roseanne kiss in 1994.

Thus, the good news for *Ellen* is that if the show offers up a string of lesbian lovelies as guest stars, it stands to garner more than a temporary ratings bump —even though DeGeneres herself resembles a slightly effeminate Van Patten brother. The bad news for *Ellen* is that the producers have a no-kissing rule for the time being. This is clearly a mistake. It will alienate all those potential new fans who would tune in every week and not notice that the show itself stinks.

Matt Labash is a staff writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

HELL OF A COMEBACK

by Tucker Carlson

IN MARCH, JAMES A. BAKER III was summoned from semi-retirement and appointed United Nations envoy to the Western Sahara. His charge: to quell a dispute between the government of Morocco and a rebel group over a sparsely populated tract of land. Less than a month later, the former secretary of state found himself standing on the South Lawn of the White House lecturing the American people on the merits of the Chemical Weapons Convention. How did Baker move from the relative obscurity of Houston to the utter obscurity of the North African desert and back to the national stage all in under 30 days?

Much of the blame must go to President Clinton, who has made something of a hobby of refurbishing washed-up Republican moderates. David Gergen, Dick Morris, Bill Cohen . . . none would be appearing regularly on television today were it not for the perverse generosity of Bill Clinton. But Baker's reemergence also is evidence of a larger and stranger trend: Bush-administration chic.

Twice in the last several weeks, the Clinton White House has sent out a call for help to aging Bushies. From the golf course and lecture circuit they have come, to be trotted out in public forums to add bipartisan luster to Clinton initiatives. The fact that Bush-era luminaries are lending support to Clinton-administration programs is not surprising—indeed, the Bush people are not saying anything substantively different from what they have always said. Nor is it all that surprising just how tedious it has been to hear them say it again.

Consider Baker's remarks at a White House rally for the Chemical Weapons Convention. The convention, Baker pointed out, had originally been negotiated under the Reagan and Bush administrations. To oppose it now, he implied, would be tantamount to

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spitting in the faces of those two great presidents: "Frankly, the suggestion that George Bush and Ronald Reagan would negotiate a treaty detrimental to this nation's security is outrageous." Should recalcitrant right-wing Republicans in the Senate continue to stonewall ratification, Baker warned, "we will throw in our lot with the rogue states which oppose this treaty." In other words, support this treaty, or America will descend to the moral level of North Korea.

This is political rhetoric at its most overheated, and with Baker employing it, Clinton didn't have to. Compared with the frothing former secretary of state, in fact, the president seemed unusually presidential, above mere political considerations. Which, of course, was exactly the point. Clinton spent the bulk of his opening remarks thanking Baker and the various Republicans who had joined him on chemical weapons, including Bush veterans Brent Scowcroft and Colin Powell as well as former senators Warren Rudman and Nancy Kassebaum Baker.

Four days later, in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, current secretary of state Madeleine Albright continued the theme. Albright slathered Republicans in sorghum-thick praise, citing "wise diplomats" like Baker and Scowcroft, "experienced military leaders" such as retired generals Powell and Norman Schwarzkopf, and "thoughtful public officials" like Kassebaum Baker who have worked to support the Clinton chemical weapons policy.

It's hard to blame the Clinton administration for putting willing Republicans to good public-relations use—it's all part of building a "center governing coalition," explains White House press secretary Mike McCurry happily—but there have been several unintended consequences. Later this month, Colin Powell (and Bush himself) will share a stage with Clinton at the self-consciously bipartisan Volunteerism Summit in Philadelphia. The favorable publicity Powell may receive there reportedly is causing anxiety at the White House, which sees him as a potential opponent in 2000. During a "motivating videoconference" in preparation for the summit, Powell caused a minor controversy by introducing Hillary Clinton in a way she and her husband considered insufficiently laudatory. Mrs. Clinton, CNN reported, "felt her introduc-

"Isn't the US Sugar program a subsidy to a few select sugar farmers?"

FLOSUN SUGAR

Absolutely not! The sugar policy was reformed by Congress creating a free domestic sugar market.

The pricing and allocation rules were all repealed in the 1995 Farm Bill.

No direct payments are made by the United States Government to Sugar Farmers.

The US sugar policy simply protects US Sugar Farmers from the unfair heavily subsidized competition of foreign governments and their sugar farmers.

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tion seemed cursory, lacked respect." The relationship between the White House and Powell is sure to get more uncomfortable from there.

Perhaps worst of all, the administration's decision to bring back the Bushies has led to an alarming rise in Jimmy Carter Syndrome, a latent viral illness that causes justly retired political figures to share their opinions in public. The Clintons created the perfect conditions for an outbreak, and, sure enough, James Baker caught an especially bad case. The day before he appeared at the White House, Baker addressed students at Georgetown University. "I would like to cast my remarks broadly in terms of a few of the key foreign policy challenges confronting the United States on the eve of the 21st century," he began, and it got more ambitious from there. By the sixth paragraph, the envoy to the Western Sahara was declaring, "My first challenge is maintaining our role in the Pacific in ways that advance regional security and prosperity." Next thing you know, he'll be monitoring elections and praising the shapely figures of dictators' wives.

Baker already sounds wistful for his days as a Middle East negotiator. In early April, he attacked the administration from the left, criticizing "my government" for not doing more to stop the construction of Israeli apartments in East Jerusalem. "I am deeply disappointed, if I may say so, that we have let bombs and bulldozers drive the process," a grave Baker told the *Washington Times*. "There is no excuse for bombs, but in my view there is also no excuse for bulldozers."

Sure, it's annoying to hear such sappy banalities from a man who should be relaxing by the pool at his house in suburban Texas. But it's also sort of sad. Watching onetime public officials desperately clinging to relevancy when they aren't really relevant is a little like tuning in late-night TV and catching aging prime-time soap actresses doing infomercials for skincare products. At a Senate hearing in late February, Sen. James Inhofe asked Gen. Schwarzkopf to explain his position on a specific aspect of the Chemical Weapons Convention. "I will confess to you that I have not read every single detail of that convention, so therefore I really can't give you an expert opinion," admitted Schwarzkopf, who had come to deliver his expert opinion.

Pressed for his views on Article X of the treaty, which would compel the United States to share defense technology with co-signatories such as Iran, Schwarzkopf all but fell apart: "As I said, Senator, I'm not familiar with all the details—I—you know, a country, particularly like Iran, I think we should share as little as possible with them in the way of our military capabilities."

Schwarzkopf hasn't been heard from on the subject much since. Bill Clinton, on the other hand, hasn't slowed down a bit. At a recent press conference, the head Democrat went so far as to cite Republican support for the Chemical Weapons Convention as his main argument for it. "I do not believe that all those military leaders who were here with us earlier this week and the Republican leaders, including Sen. Kassebaum Baker and former Secretary of State Jim Baker, would do something that was dangerous for America," declared Clinton earnestly. It did not amount to a compelling case.

Tucker Carlson is a staff writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

DEFICIT? WHAT DEFICIT?

by Kevin L. Kliesen and Laurence J. Kotlikoff

CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS have to move beyond the Balanced Budget Amendment. It's an intellectual error and a political loser. As evidence, consider the recent debate about the amendment, which had a through-the-looking-glass quality. It wasn't just the politicians running between hearing rooms and television interviews like the Mad Hatter, but what they were saying that was so surreal. They all wanted to balance the budget, and they all knew exactly which budget to balance. Trouble is, they were all talking about different budgets. This one wanted Social Security in the budget; that one wanted to exclude capital expenditures; a third wanted to control for inflation, and on and on.

The Mad Hatters are, in fact, making three fundamental mistakes in considering our fiscal policy. Their first mistake is the belief that the deficit measures something economic. Despite the commonplace belief that a government's budget deficit is a meaningful measure of its fiscal policy, economic theory tells us it is not. Indeed, the deficit is a simple reflection of our vocabulary. A good example of the arbitrary nature of fiscal labels arises in the case of Social Security. The U.S. government labels our Social Security contributions "taxes" and our Social Security benefits "transfers." Suppose, instead, it started calling our Social Security contributions "loans to the government" and our Social Securi-

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ty benefits "return of principal plus interest" (the difference between the two being an "old-age tax"). With these labels, which make just as much sense as the standard ones, the reported federal deficit would be entirely different. Indeed, were we to start using this choice of words, last year's federal deficit would have been more than $350 billion larger than the amount actually reported!

The labeling of Social Security contributions is not an isolated example. Literally every dollar the government takes in or pays out is labeled in an economically arbitrary manner. As a consequence, the so-called unified deficit that is now used in Washington is simply one of an infinite number of possible deficits, each of which depends on the issue of what *words* (not actions) the government chooses.

Thus the problem of defining the deficit runs much deeper than most people believe. This includes many, if not most, economists who continue to believe that the government's deficit is connected to the level of interest rates, the trade deficit, national saving, and inflation. This deficit delusion is hard to shake because virtually everyone is using the term "budget deficit" as if it had real meaning.

What's needed, therefore, is a change in the terms of the debate. Instead of focusing on the *budget*, we should start focusing on *generational balance*.

Generational balance, simply put, means future generations will not be forced to pay confiscatory tax rates, while receiving dramatically reduced health and retirement benefits, solely because those of us alive today choose not to bear the true burden of paying for the goods and services we demand from the government.

Assessing whether current fiscal policy is generationally balanced requires the use of generational accounting, which is economic theory's prescription for how we should assess the fiscal treatment of current and future generations. Generational accounting starts from the premise that there is no such thing as a free lunch—that either current or future generations will have to pay the government's bills. Generational accounting (which is being done by the governments of, among others, Japan, the United Kingdom, Norway, New Zealand, Italy, and Chile) is quite similar to the methodology employed by the Social Security trustees in formulating their annual assessment of the entitlement's long-term finances.

A convenient way to summarize the findings of generational accounting is in terms of each generation's lifetime net tax rates. These have increased from 24 percent for the generation born at the turn of the century to 34 percent for children who have just been born. More depressing, the lifetime net tax rate facing future generations—assuming current living generations, including today's children, end up paying the net tax rate implied by current policy—is a colossal 84 percent. By the way, these generational-accounting calculations are based on the government's own projections.

The difference between the 84 percent net tax rate of future generations and the 34 percent net tax rate of

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Gentleman's Pocket Knife (GPK)

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***But read this ad for an even better deal!**

This nifty little knife is just over two inches long. Yet, in its small body it carries some implements that'll come in handy in life's little contingencies. There is the knife blade, of course; then a pair of real working scissors; and a handy nail file/groomer. Hidden inside (just pull them out!) are a couple of extra surprises: a small pair of tweezers and a permanent "ivory" toothpick. The whole thing comes with a little ring so that you can put the GPK on your key chain.

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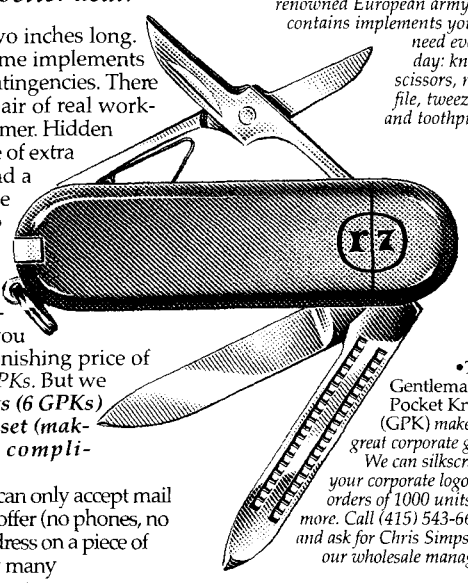

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today's newborns tells us two things. First, current fiscal policy is not sustainable. We cannot tax successive new generations at only a 34 percent net rate and still pay the government's bills. Second, the size of the net tax rate facing future generations is so large (over twice that facing current newborns) that it simply cannot be, and will not be, collected.

The Hatters' second mistake—equating budget balance with generational balance—follows from their first. So-called pay-as-you-go Social Security provides the most striking example of why budget balance and generational balance have no necessary relationship. Under pay-as-you-go Social Security, the government chooses its words so that its expropriation from young and future generations never shows up in its reported budget deficit. This extortion occurs by forcing young and future generations to participate in a very bad investment.

Consider today's young Americans. As a group, they'll be lucky if they receive Social Security retirement and other benefits that are as large as their lifetime contributions to Social Security; i.e., they'll be lucky if they recover the principal on their forced investment in the program. In contrast, were today's young Americans free to invest their contributions in U.S. financial markets, particularly the equity market, the value in retirement of their investment would, in all likelihood, equal at least four times their contributions. Since young and future generations can be made equally worse off if (a) they are forced to participate in lousy investment deals or (b) they are free to invest their savings but are forced to pay high taxes to cover the interest on official government debt, we need a fiscal measure that captures their burdens, regardless of its official description.

Would passage of the Balanced Budget Amendment ensure generational balance? Not a chance. Consider the 1995 Republican budget vetoed by the president. The proposal entailed cutting all outlays, except defense and Social Security. Balancing "the" budget in this manner, while slightly raising the net taxation of existing generations, reduces the fiscal burden on future generations from 84 percent to (a still enormous) 72 percent.

Thus, in looking at the unified deficit, Congress is getting the impression that far less fiscal restraint is needed than is actually the case. The problem is that neither the unified budget nor the unified budget excluding Social Security is the right budget to balance. The right budget to balance is the government's long-term, or intertemporal, budget on which generational accounting is based. From this perspective what is needed is not a constitutional amendment to achieve budget balance, but one that ensures generational balance.

The third mistake is assuming that we can achieve generational balance without the help of the elderly. Well, why not largely spare the elderly and just cut government spending to achieve generational balance? The answer is that virtually all (97 percent) of federal government purchases would have to be cut to lower the net tax rate facing future generations from 84 to 34 percent. This is unrealistic for several reasons, not the least of which is that, relative to GDP, federal purchases are, by historical standards, already quite low. Even were federal purchases held constant in real terms from that point onward, future generations would still face an exorbitant net tax rate—about 73 percent.

The simple fact of the matter is that today's elderly must bear a higher net tax burden if we are to remove the fiscal Sword of Damocles hanging over the heads of future generations. The most important and least painful way for the elderly to make their contribution is for them to demand that growth of Medicare and Medicaid be limited to the amount warranted by growth in labor productivity and demographic change. (In the case of Medicare, benefits per beneficiary have risen in inflation-adjusted dollars by over one quarter in just the last four years.) Such stabilization of Medicare and Medicaid spending would lower the net tax rate facing future generations from 84 percent to about 51 percent.

We could also raise taxes. The requisite immediate and permanent hike in federal income taxes (personal and corporate) needed to achieve generational balance is 52 percent! The corresponding payroll tax hike is 64 percent. Other options are an immediate and permanent 95 percent cut in Social Security benefits or, as mentioned, an immediate and permanent 97 percent cut in federal government purchases.

Notwithstanding all the attention it receives, budget balance is largely beside the point when it comes to considering the fiscal burden we are placing on young and future Americans. Most of this burden is missed by the conventional unified budget deficit because of the choice of fiscal language. If we are really serious about sparing our children and grandchildren a fiscal nightmare, we need to discard the budget deficit as a measure of generational policy. Instead, it's high time that public policymakers use generational accounting on an ongoing basis so that they, as well as the general public, will have a clear understanding of the extent to which current fiscal policy is endangering the next generations.

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THE SELLING OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

By Lawrence F. Kaplan

For evidence that American foreign policy has abandoned its traditional moorings, one need only glance at a newspaper. On a typical day, the national press will report items such as the following: The Navy evicts a Marine Corps battalion from its base in southern California—to make room for a Chinese shipping company linked to arms smugglers; during a meeting with Taiwanese officials, the senior American emissary on the island protests that he does not wish to discuss Taiwan's security, but rather the type of securities that are purchased on Wall Street; the American ambassador to South Korea litters the embassy lawn with new-model American cars while throwing an "automobile show" to promote U.S. exports. Though economic considerations have always been present in the formulation of American foreign policy, rarely before have they dominated the other components of our international policy as they do today, in the era of "commercial diplomacy."

The brainchild of the late Commerce secretary Ron Brown, commercial diplomacy seeks, according to Brown's former deputy Jeffrey Garten, to use "Washington's official muscle to help firms crack overseas markets." In a remarkably candid essay in the current issue of *Foreign Affairs*, President Clinton's first-term undersecretary of commerce writes of the need "to reach a renewed consensus about the centrality of commercial interests in foreign policy" and insists that "the United States should use all its foreign policy levers to achieve commercial goals."

And the White House has done just that. Envisioning an international arena dominated by "geo-economics," where political and military concerns take a back seat to the global search for new financial markets, the administration has largely abandoned the strategic and ideological pillars of American foreign policy. On the advice of its Commerce Department "war room," the administration "engages" nations of all stripes. Candidate states require no background checks; no profit margin is too small, almost no regime too distasteful for the apostles of commercial engagement.

With an annual per capita income of less than $900, the Republic of Sudan would seem an unlikely target for commercial diplomacy. Sudan's links to terrorist activities and its war on its Christian population have earned the country a place on the State Department list of rogue states with which American companies are prohibited from doing business. Yet last year Occidental Petroleum informed the White House of an oil deal that would pump 150,000 barrels a day from a Sudanese oil field—netting considerable profits for both Occidental and the Sudan. All that stood in the way of this happy marriage was the 1996 Anti-Terrorism Act—from which the president promptly exempted the newest Islamic republic.

The Clinton administration also decided to exempt Syria from the anti-terrorism legislation despite its certification by the State Department as a sponsor of terror groups and perpetrator of mass human-rights abuses, so Syria continues to enjoy millions of dollars in American investment. Similarly, Lebanon, occupied by Syrian troops and host to an alphabet soup of terrorist organizations, is now open for American business. "They always pay their bills," trumpeted Kenneth Brody, who ceaselessly promoted the home of Hezbollah as fertile ground for American corporations before stepping down as chairman of the U.S. government's Export-Import Bank last year. "Our purpose," he said, "is to create American jobs, not promote peace."

The White House has also tried to woo North Korea with trade deals. Under the terms of a 1994 accord that the administration signed with North Korea, American companies may now engage in a variety of commercial transactions with that nation's Stalinist regime. Already, U.S. firms have begun to import minerals from North Korea, invest in the state's oil refineries and power stations, and process North Korea's international financial transactions.

Even Burma—perhaps the world's most brutal police state—remains immune from the censure of

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one of its largest investors. Last July, Congress passed legislation that would institute a trade embargo against Rangoon if it did not improve its abysmal human-rights record. It has not. Instead, in the words of the *New York Times*, 1996 was Burma's "worst year of repression in this decade." Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel laureate imprisoned by the Burmese government, has pleaded for the president to act on the proposed embargo. Clinton, however, refuses to apply sanctions that would jeopardize the $220 million American companies have invested in Burma.

The White House now intends to "review" the trade embargo on Iran. In March, administration officials told the *International Herald Tribune* that "a possible new horizon for relations could take the form of a common Western position offering Tehran the prospect of slowly expanding economic ties, if Iran were willing to respect a general code of peaceful coexistence." Such sentiments mirror Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's recent assertion that our policy of "critical silence" toward Iran has failed—this despite the fact that the Iranian economy is reported to be on the brink of collapse.

Though the pariah status of states such as Iran, North Korea, and Syria constrains trade with these nations, the Clinton administration tirelessly promotes business deals with other countries that pursue human rights and security policies as threatening to our national interests, if not more so, than those pursued by the "official" collection of rogue states.

A typical example of an unsavory regime whose economic power ensures its exclusion from the State Department embargo list is the government of Indonesia. Like Burma, Indonesia routinely arrests journalists, academics, students, and union officials for no greater offense than the practice of free speech. Indonesia's excuse for its repressive policies has become a mantra throughout East Asia: "Our human rights concept is not individualistic, but relies more on the interests of the community, the nation and the state," proclaims the nation's foreign minister. Even so, Ron Brown secured billions of dollars worth of Indonesian contracts for American companies, including a construction deal for General Electric reported to be worth $2.6 billion.

Another state whose value as a market precludes serious criticism is Mexico, source of three-quarters of the cocaine that flows into the United States each year and a country which, according to the State Department, "poses a more immediate narcotics threat to the United States" than any other in the world. Yet, not two weeks after discovering that the commander of Mexico's much lauded anti-drug effort was himself a drug dealer, President Clinton certified the commitment of our third largest trading partner to fighting narcotics trafficking. Similarly, though the Russian army was until recently busy bulldozing entire Chechen cities, the president issued a communiqué announcing his wish "to extend Most Favored Nation status to Russia on a permanent and unconditional basis."

So taken is the administration with the notion of a world where only economics matters that it has actively encouraged the efforts of American companies to auction off previously restricted technologies to foreign bidders. Indeed, at the forefront of this effort have been the administration's commercial diplomats at the Commerce Department, a group notable for its failure to submit high-tech export licenses to the Pentagon for review—including those for missile-related and stealth technology—according to a 1995 GAO report.

In 1994, the administration announced that it was abolishing almost all export restrictions on computer and telecommunications technology. It also led the way in shutting down Cocom, a multilateral organization charged with monitoring high-tech exports during the Cold War. Then earlier this year, the president authorized the launching of commercial satellites able to photograph small objects with the precision of a spy satellite. Though well aware that the primary consumers of commercial-satellite imagery will be nations that cannot afford their own spy satellites, the White House has brushed off Pentagon concerns that peddling high-resolution photographs for profit may not be such a good idea.

As it subsidizes potential adversaries with lucrative trade deals and sensitive technology, the Clinton administration frequently wields trade as a weapon with which to bludgeon our strategic allies. This new double standard has been most evident in the case of Japan, with which the Clinton administration spent the larger part of its first term bickering over car parts. In May 1995, after months of recriminations with the Japanese, White House spokesman Michael McCurry took the unprecedented step of predicting that our military alliance with Japan would be harmed if a particular trade disagreement were not resolved in our favor. When it emerged that the CIA, which the administration had retooled for "economic espionage," had been spying on Japan's trade representatives, our already strained security relationship deteriorated still further.

While the administration's "strategic trade" theorists referred publicly to Japan in terms once reserved for adversaries, real threats were emerging in the

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region. When in 1994, during a particularly tense period in commercial relations between Japan and the United States, a crisis erupted in North Korea that required the deployment of an American task force, the Japanese proved noticeably less than helpful. In the wake of last year's Marine rape case on Okinawa, it appeared for a time that the American military presence in Japan might be in jeopardy. With most of our other bases in East Asia long since mothballed and an increasingly belligerent China probing our military commitment to the region, the White House had come perilously close to alienating a strategic ally for the sake of selling a few mufflers.

The garage-sale quality of our foreign policy has spawned a level of corruption among the nation's political elite that, even in this era, numbs otherwise cynical minds. As Jeffrey Garten, the co-architect of the policy, recently wrote, "You can't understand the 1996 money mess without grasping the environment in which commercial diplomacy was born. . . . If you open a wild bazaar, as we did, you have to expect the occasional pickpocket." The political costs of commercial diplomacy, however, pale beside the strategic and moral compromises made for the sake of financial gain.

Michael Ramirez

The administration will not admit that its overriding foreign policy concern is to make money for American corporations. Instead, it has trotted out well-worn—and largely bankrupt—theoretical justifications of our dollar-based diplomacy. To allay concerns that the United States no longer cares about human rights abuses, the president and his allies in the business community assert—despite mounting evidence to the contrary in places such as China, Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia—that trade and investment encourage the democratization of authoritarian states. While waiting for that to happen, Garten suggests that the U.S. government award prizes to firms that demonstrate concern for human rights "like the Malcolm Baldridge Awards given to American companies for excellence in products and services." And to pacify those alarmed by our willingness to sell sensitive technology to unfriendly countries, President Clinton speaks of building "peace through trade, investment and commerce." That history has already shown the hollowness of this prediction—from the Marne to the Persian Gulf—is of little concern to the White House. Indeed, many in the administration seem embarrassed by such arguments. "It's all about widening market access," admits Undersecretary of Commerce Stuart Eizenstat.

By promoting commercial diplomacy at the expense of our strategic interests, President Clinton has essentially rolled the dice, betting that security issues represent nothing more than what one administration official described to the *New York Times* as "stratocrap and globaloney." The White House assumes that the rest of the world will recognize the diminished utility of military power—the notion that war will soon go the way of dueling. Unfortunately, no evidence exists to suggest that nations such as China and Syria share this conviction.

Still more troubling is the eagerness with which the administration has compromised our moral authority in its efforts to drum up business contracts. Perhaps the size of the Chinese market may justify overlooking that nation's brutal human-rights record and its belligerent international conduct (though our $40 billion trade deficit with China recommends otherwise). But what explains our eagerness to provide Syria, Sudan, and Burma with financial sustenance? Are the relatively meager profits that American companies make from these countries truly worth the moral capital that the United States must forfeit each time one of them lands a contract with a dictatorship? If making money is all we are about, then the answer is yes. But greed is no foundation upon which to base a foreign policy.

It would be wrong to fault American business for the excesses of commercial diplomacy. As Robert Kagan has observed of corporate behavior during the Cold War, "It was not that businessmen were bad; their legitimate goal of maximizing profits merely conflicted sometimes with the nation's moral, strategic

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and even economic aspirations." So it remains today. The White House, however, has an obligation to distinguish between corporate interests and the national interest. American foreign policy, after all, has always stood—and should continue to stand—for something more than crass commercialism.

If doing business with the devil carries with it unacceptable costs for the nation, it will also take a toll on those who have enshrined this practice as national policy. The moral of the story has yet to be written, but a fitting conclusion is not too difficult to imagine. As investigations into the foreign-donor scandals proceed, it appears increasingly likely that commercial diplomacy, having diminished our moral standing in the international arena, may yet exact a similarly high price from its creators. ♦

Yes, Sex, Please, We're British

By David Brooks

London

Paul Johnson says there is a mutual attraction between Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair that is, at its core, sexual. "Lady Thatcher is incapable of having a relationship with a male politician without a slight sexual element," the historian recently wrote in the *Daily Telegraph*. Johnson says that Blair, now the leader of the Labour party, is not precisely the Iron Lady's type: The former prime minister and Conservative party leader normally prefers the "rough trade" boys like the current defense minister, Michael Portillo. But in conversation, Johnson reports, Lady Thatcher praises Blair's appearance—especially the fact that he is so neat.

Britain is the one place on earth where right-wingers have established a reputation for ribald lubriciousness, while left-wingers have become known for prissy puritanism. So maybe it would be fitting if the most formidable right-winger of them all were indeed fond of the politician who will probably lead the Labour party into power for the first time since 1979.

But in the end, I think Johnson's theory signifies nothing more than that the British conservatives have sex on the brain. The Tory party has entered the current campaign, which concludes in an election on May 1, pretty much as it has conducted itself during the five years since the last parliamentary election—hell-bent on duplicating on a nationwide scale Teddy Kennedy's feats in his best days. Scarcely a season has gone by without one Tory member of Parliament or another found either dallying with a teenager; in embarrassing or fatal autoerotic positions; sleeping with colleagues in foreign hotel rooms; or showing up in compromising passages in the diaries of men and women they should have avoided.

In the initial weeks of the campaign, the chairman of the Scottish Conservative party resigned over what was reported to have been a homosexual affair with a researcher. A member of Parliament named Allan Stewart resigned over an extramarital heterosexual affair. His colleague Jerry Hayes resigned when his teenage love letters to a male friend were obtained by a publicist and sold for profit. Yet another member, Piers Merchant, was photographed in a park with his hand up the miniskirt of nightclub hostess Anna Cox. Cox is estimated to have earned about $50,000 for her part in revealing the affair. Merchant responded by very publicly reconciling with his wife, kissing her passionately in front of a bank of cameras.

Merchant is joining a bevy of confessed adulterers running for reelection on the Tory platform. They include David Mellor, whose dalliance with a young woman forced his resignation from the cabinet a few years ago, and Sir Alan Clark, whose bestselling diaries described simultaneous escapades with a mother and her two daughters known, in the diaries as "the coven." The husband and father of "the coven" once threatened to horsewhip Sir Alan, and now he has

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flown up from South Africa to campaign against him. But it won't help. Clark will win.

This appalling behavior is so pervasive, it seemed at first blush that there might be an ideological reason for it. The *Sunday Telegraph*'s Christopher Booker has found one. He argues that since Parliament has signed so many of its powers over to the Brussels bureaucracy that runs the European Union, members have nothing left to do but misbehave. "Is it then surprising that these same MPs drink themselves to death in lonely hotel rooms," Booker writes, "or engage in fatal auto-erotic acts with oranges, when they no longer have any proper self-respecting role?"

But that's pushing it, even for a Euroskeptic like me. Which leaves the question: What *is* going on in British politics?

There is a more superficially plausible explanation for the Tory sex obsession that has to do with Britain's class structure: Call it "the return of the Cavaliers."

Peregrine Worsthorne, the British columnist who is the voice of the aristocracy, complained in the 1980s that when the Thatcherites took over the Tory party, they banished the "rumbustious, Falstaffian, devil-may-care" ethos of upper-class Toryism and replaced it with middle-class morality based on "thrift, sobriety, and work." Now that the Thatcherites have been shoved off to the angry periphery of the Conservative party, perhaps the older brand of Toryism has reasserted itself.

Auberon Waugh, the son of Evelyn and the other great voice of the reactionary upper classes (I mean that in the best sense), has sided with adulterers like Piers Merchant on the grounds that they represent a blow against the middle-class morality of the tabloids and Tory prime minister John Major. (Waugh did object to the way Merchant publicly reconciled with his wife, arguing that he should not have French-kissed her in public.) Maybe, having been in office for 18 years now, the Tory party has assumed the characteristics of an entitled aristocracy, with all the corrosive decadence that implies.

Those of you who attended a decent high school will remember that back in the 17th century, the aristocratic Cavaliers (said to be "wrong but wromantic" in the great British satire *1066 and All That*) took on Oliver Cromwell and his Puritan Roundheads ("right but repulsive"). As the Tories seem to be turning themselves into Cavaliers, the Labour party leaders seem to be turning themselves into Roundheads—prudish, socially conservative, judgmental.

It's not only that Blair has admitted to spanking his kids, an incredible deviation from Labour party thinking (and always a front-burner issue in England, for reasons I refuse to speculate upon). But even more surprising, Blair is deeply and publicly religious, and not in a let-us-spend-more-money-on-the-welfare-state Church-of-England style either. He believes in real religion, complete with sin, virtue and vice, and tough moral codes. While at Cambridge, Blair fell in with a group of theologians and for some time thought of becoming a priest. Unlike their conservative brethren in the United States, most members of the Tory party would sooner eat glass than talk publicly about religion. Meantime, Blair published an essay this year called "Why I Am a Christian," and he takes tremendous heat, given his party's commitment to egalitarian education, because he sends one of his children to a Catholic school. (Blair takes communion at both Anglican and Catholic churches, giving hope to those who wish to bring the Church of England back into the arms of Rome four-and-a-half centuries after Henry VIII got his divorce.)

Now, according to informal surveys, over half the Labour party's shadow-cabinet members attend church regularly, and they are willing to talk publicly about their religious convictions—this in a country where fewer people to go church than have affairs with Tory members of Parliament. Blair is a member of the Christian Socialists, which at this point is more Christian than socialist, the fastest-growing association inside the Labour party.

The talk of morality is getting so thick in the air that a former Labour official named Mike Marqusee has written a piece in the *Nation* called "Britain's Orgy of Piety" in which he unfurls his contempt for all the moral goings-on inside what was formerly a nice white-wine socialist party filled with joyless Harold Pinter-style debauchery and silent despair. Among the horrors cited by Marqusee are a new get-tough policy on crime, an announcement by Mr. Blair that the two-parent family is the "ideal" kind, and a Blair attack on "moral libertarianism."

To sum up the Cavalier-Roundhead thesis: The Tories are a party either oblivious to or reticent about religion and social issues, with the sort of loose and ironic code of personal behavior you find among the upper classes or inside parties that believe they hold a permanent majority. They are what the Republican party might be if it didn't have its socially conservative wing. Meanwhile, the Labour party has rediscovered its working-class Methodist roots, its tidy working-class morality, and has managed the impressive and politically potent feat of combining social conservatism with welfare-state liberalism.

I loved my Cavalier-Roundhead theory. I tested it against what I was seeing in various electoral districts.

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I proposed it to deep thinkers here. And within days it was in tatters.

In the first place, it is no longer possible to explain British politics in terms of class. This is one of Margaret Thatcher's legacies. As Frank Johnson and Bruce Anderson of the London *Spectator* rather ruefully explained to me, the middle class *has* triumphed; the Conservative party has scarcely a trace left of the old landed-gentry sensibility. Under the high-school dropout John Major, who took over from Thatcher in 1990, the classlessness of the party has only deepened.

At the same time, the Labour party under Tony Blair is quickly losing its working-class flavor. For example, the party is featuring advertisements showing businessmen supporting Labour. One of the businessmen is shown saying kind words about Labour—the class-warrior party that drove Britain to a per capita income lower than Puerto Rico's back in the 1970s —while riding in the back seat of his chauffeur-driven Mercedes.

Second, Blair's effort to inject religion and religious morality into the campaign is a flop. Last week, he spent an entire day talking about the need to restore "the moral dimension" to politics. His efforts yielded nothing but a few brief stories buried inside the newspapers.

There may be a vestige of working-class Methodism in the party, but it's a pretty tiny vestige. "Blair is a religiously serious man," says Charles Moore, editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, "but those issues haven't amounted to much." The bulk of the Labour party is either bewildered by or hostile to all the Christian talk. John Major and the Tories dodge values talk by falling back on the old party theory that moral matters are for archbishops, not politicians—but the religious authorities here want no part of it. Different religious groups have issued three major reports during this campaign, all of them having to do with the need for greater funding of the welfare state. They sank without a trace.

Nor have the British people themselves shown an interest in a campaign centering on morality. The feeling is that any politician who tried to give a *Murphy Brown*-style speech would be hooted down for straying out of his area.

There is almost no talk among the major parties about abortion, euthanasia, gay marriage, pornography, the death penalty, or single parenthood. Though Blair has self-consciously modeled his move to the center-right on Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign, the one area in which he and the Labourites have not copied the Clintonites is in matters like school uniforms and child-safety seats, issues that Clinton used to win the soccer moms. The Labour party does have a line in its manifesto proposing a ban on cigarette advertising. It would be extremely controversial if anybody took it seriously, but nobody does.

The issues the politicians do want to talk about concern management: Who can run the welfare state more efficiently? Who can reduce the size of school classes with available resources? What is the proper amount of regulation in the workplace? As *Guardian* columnist Hugo Young says, the two parties agree or say they agree on capitalism (they're for it), redistribution (both are against it), taxes (no increases), and public spending (same level as now). So the only issue left to differ on is how to manage the status quo.

Michael Ramirez

John Major

As my theory collapsed, I found myself thanking God for the Christian Coalition. American right-wing evangelicals shove values issues in our faces and make us debate them in political forums—perhaps not always subtly, but honestly, at least. And because American politicians are compelled to tackle these issues, American politics is concerned with the really important changes in American life, which have far more to do with values than they do with fiscal policy.

Our U.S. elections may seem boring and trivial, but they are nowhere near as inconsequential as Britain's recent, values-free elections. The BBC has seen its evening-news ratings fall by a third during the election campaign. All of the newspapers are suffering circulation drops. This is striking because Britons are far more engaged in politics than Americans are, in part because the state has played a much larger role in British life than it ever has in America.

The politicians have responded to their reduced status by being even more aggressive on the stump. On TV and over the radio, John Major looks like a wimp, or, as he's been described, a squirrel caught in the headlights. But in person he is deeply impressive, a far

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better stump speaker than either Dole or Clinton. He is somehow able to mold his metallic voice to Churchillian rhythms, and he is wonderfully fluid, speaking clearly and substantively for 45 minutes or so, breaking occasionally for asides that are quite witty. He can talk about his boyhood in working-class Brixton and the death of his father during his childhood in a way that is emotional without being sappy. He can even talk about the National Health Service without being boring, which is an incredible achievement.

But it's in Q&As that British politicians excel, especially Major, because he is so brutal. At a recent press conference a reporter tried to needle him by asking whether he would support the European Union down the line, even if it adopted as official policy the killing of the firstborn. "Are you a firstborn?" Major asked. "Because if you are I would give that policy serious consideration."

Blair is Clintonian in his soft rhetoric and his general sycophancy toward his audiences. Major is not. When a young man at a rally asked how he could trust Major given all the sleaze in the party, Major erupted in a five-minute barrage of controlled anger that pounded the poor guy into the ground. Indeed, during the 30-minute Q&A that day, everyone who asked a hostile question was squashed. Major is equally blunt with Blair in the House of Commons, of course, and in person you can finally see why his peers made him prime minister. Around a cabinet table, he must be a force.

The Tories were in the grip of a strange euphoria last week, telling one another that things were turning around and the race was about to tighten. They are responding to John Major's success on the stump; after you see him, you can't fathom how his party can be losing. But it is. The Tories are behind by about 20 points, and that gap has held steady for an amazing 56 months. Neither Major nor the booming economy has been able to improve Tory fortunes.

The Tories will lose this election, and the only question left is whether they will respond to defeat by moving right or left. It might not matter so much. Politics is a declining industry in post-Thatcher Britain. It attracts fewer true believers and more careerists, more interested in their lodgings and their lusts than in ideology or national greatness. We've seen what happens to countries that are overpoliticized, where politics crowds everyday life. Britain is an amusing and sobering object lesson in what happens to a country where politics doesn't matter enough. ♦

1917 AND ALL THAT

We Are Still Living in the Shadow of World War I

By David Frum

You open a magazine and there's an advertisement—for blue jeans, for perfume, for a radio station, it could be anything. The ad copy says something like, "Breaking all the rules."

Our culture, high and low, is suffused with a gleeful contempt for traditional forms of authority and traditional standards. This contempt inspires rock videos and the proceedings of the Modern Language Association; it can be seen in situation comedies and dictionaries. And yet, paradoxically, one can at the same time sense in contemporary America a desperate hunger for rules and standards. This hunger has made millionaires of the popular authors and broadcasters who can speak to it—William Bennett, Judith Martin, Laura Schlessinger, and the two New York area women who composed *The Rules*. Across the country, aspiring politicians have won thousands of elections to school boards, to district attorney's offices, to Congress by promising stricter and tougher enforcement of moral norms. Intellectuals as diverse as communitarian philosopher Michael Sandel and immigration critic Peter Brimelow have tried, each in his own way, to formulate some new vision of a coherent America. President Clinton himself won his uphill battle in 1992 by identifying him-

Contributing editor David Frum's article "The Libertarian Temptation" appeared in last week's issue.

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self with a "forgotten middle class" that "plays by the rules."

Human beings yearn for rules to live by. And yet it's equally clear that these rules—whether of language, of aesthetics, of etiquette, of academic excellence, of the most fundamental areas of morality—aren't there, that they haven't been there for a very long time, and that they therefore cannot be enforced. The Supreme Court has gone so far as to claim that the very idea of agreed-upon norms may contravene the fundamental promises of the American Constitution. It said in the landmark 1992 case *Planned Parenthood* v. *Casey*, "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life."

The problem is, of course, that most of us simply aren't capable of defining our own concepts of meaning. We take them secondhand or third-hand from others—from the leaders of our society, from our elites. John Maynard Keynes described this transmission of values in his characteristically blunt way: "Civilization was a thin and precarious crust erected by the personality and will of the few, and only maintained by rules and conventions skillfully put across and guilefully preserved." No wonder, then, that so many feel their civilization is corroding. American and European elites have declined to do their job of putting across and preserving the rules and conventions most people yearn for. It's not that our elites have ceased to govern. It's that they govern in a curious, arguably unprecedented, way. They present themselves less as elites than as anti-elites. They rest their legitimacy—their right to rule in politics, their right to lead intellectual opinion, their right to decide aesthetic questions, their right to construe the law, their right to instruct the young—not on their ability to interpret and preserve society's inherited rules, but on their eagerness to emancipate their fellow citizens from those inherited rules. It has been the great theme of the 20th century, and it threatens to dominate the 21st as well.

Moral certainty has been ebbing out of our culture for a very long time. One can trace the loss as far back as one wants to go. Matthew Arnold heard the "melancholy, long, withdrawing roar" of the sea of faith at Dover Beach 130 years ago. Or one can put the finger on a time much closer to us: For Americans, that would be the 1950s and 1960s, when the disaster in Vietnam and complicity with segregation discredited their parents in the eyes of today's forty- and fifty-something baby boomers. And yet despite all the complexities and subtleties of history, perhaps one can discern a single epicenter of the great shock that still convulses the culture of the Western world: April 1917, 80 years ago this month, when President Wilson took the United States into the war raging in Europe.

The Great War was fought a long time ago, and since then our century has suffered no end of atrocities, some of them even more appalling than the slaughter in the trenches. But it is not wrong, I think, to continue to see the war as the central event of modern times, the caesura that cleaves the Western world's 200-year-old experiment with bourgeois civilization precisely in half.

On our side of the divide, all is flux and uncertainty. On the other side lies a world in many ways more constricting than our own, but also in many ways more creative and successful. Tally up the great cultural achievements of modern times, and count how many of them we owe to people who came of age before 1914 and how comparatively paltry are the accomplishments of their successors born after 1900. It's as if some great wave of human genius took shape in the 1880s and '90s and crested in the 1910s and '20s, bequeathing us Proust and Picasso, James Joyce and Albert Einstein, T.S. Eliot and Sergei Eisenstein, Mann and Matisse, Rilke and Yeats, Frank Lloyd Wright and Maxim Gorky. Since then, our culture seems to have lost its force, the attainments of each subsequent decade more wan and mediocre than those of the decade before. It's as if by winning their freedom from Victorian restrictions, the last generation of Victorians extinguished their most powerful inspiration.

Unquestionably, the 19th century was an almost comically rule-bound age. A woman calling on a married couple must leave behind two of her husband's cards and one of her own. Poetry must rhyme. The shortest distance between two points must be a straight line. People who spend much time in the mental world of the last century—whether they are distinguished professors or readers of novels—can become dizzied by it all. The discipline seems as uncomfortable, even oppressive, as the clothes that respectable ladies and gentlemen were then obliged to wear. Every newly enriched Cincinnati pork-packer and every Berlin iron-smelter felt obliged to take upon himself and his family the rigid etiquette that once had governed the lives of princes and popes.

This rigor in daily life was only the most mundane expression of the mood of certainty that suffused 19th-century culture. There were, inevitably, dissenters from this confidence even at the time. But most people, even most highly educated people, lived in a world

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A gas attack on American soldiers in France, 1918

in which right and wrong, beauty and ugliness, civility and incivility, excellence and failure were categories more certain, more readily understood, more distinct from one another, and more in accord with their ordinary intuitions than these categories are today.

This is what we lost in the First World War.

Paul Fussell has observed that "the Great War took place in what was, compared to ours, a world where the values appeared stable and where the meanings of abstractions seemed permanent and reliable. Everyone knew what Glory was, and what Honor meant. Hemingway could declare in *A Farewell to Arms* that 'abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the deaths.' In the summer of 1914 no one would have understood what he was talking about."

That was soon to change.

• • •

In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning. . . .
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.

The Latin lines that Wilfred Owen used to conclude this, the most famous poem in our language about World War I, translate as "It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country." They come from an ode of Horace's that any educated Englishman of the last century would have learned in school. Scoffing at those words represented more than a rejection of war. It meant a rejection of the schools, the whole society, that had sent Owen to war: its bank presidents, bishops, and princesses fully as much as its generals. This theme of resentment—even hatred—of established authority pervades the retrospective judgments, literary and political, of the intellectuals of Europe and America upon the war. "Mr. Wilson's war," John Dos Passos angrily dubbed it in his great trilogy *USA*, as if the war had been inflicted on the United States by a single out-of-control politician.

The fiction that America had been lured into the war on false pretenses was a popular one in the 1920s and 1930s. *Road to War*, a 1935 bestseller by Walter Millis, an editorial writer for the *New York Herald Tribune*, pinned the blame squarely on Big Business and the House of Morgan: "The mighty stream of supplies flowed out and the corresponding stream of prosperity flowed in, and the United States was enmeshed more deeply than ever in the cause of Allied victory." A congressional committee chaired by Sen. Gerald Nye argued instead that it was the arms manufacturers—

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the famous "merchants of death"—who were responsible for dragging America into an unwanted and unnecessary catastrophe. But all the mutually amplifying postwar critics of the American intervention in the war, however much they disagreed on the identities of the culprits, agreed at least—and persuaded the public—that the men and institutions responsible for the decision to fight in 1917 stood irredeemably discredited.

If cruelty and misery can be measured, then we can truly say that human beings have done and suffered worse things than they did and suffered in 1917. But never have so many people died such painful and terrifying deaths because of the boundlessness of human stupidity as in that year. Because the leaders responsible for that stupidity—the kaisers and tsars, the generals and bishops, the journalists and professors—epitomized Europe's traditional authority, the postwar revulsion against them naturally blended into a condemnation of traditional authority altogether. In Germany, Russia, and Austria-Hungary, this revulsion acquired revolutionary force, toppling rulers and shattering empires. In the democratic West, there was no revolution to be made, and so this same mood of revulsion expressed itself as an omnidirectional cynicism.

WHEN IT WAS ALL OVER, THE WAR TURNED OUT TO HAVE KILLED NOT JUST MILLIONS OF MEN. IT ALSO KILLED THE IDEA THAT DEFERENCE TO AUTHORITY CAN HAVE ANY LEGITIMATE ROLE IN A MODERN SOCIETY.

And there was so much to be cynical about! By the spring of 1917, at least some of the Allied commanders—and quite a few of the German—seem to have begun to understand industrial war. At Vimy Ridge and Messines, British and Canadian troops won signal victories by advancing behind 500-foot-thick "creeping" barrages of artillery that moved ahead foot by foot to clear the ground ahead of them. They learned to maneuver in tiny squads, to attack at night, to halt at planned destinations and wait for the artillery in the rear to be moved forward to shelter them again. Inexcusably, the Allied High Command and the British and French political leadership would not absorb these lessons for another year. Instead, that spring and fall they led their trusting troops into two of the worst catastrophes of the whole war. In April 1917, the French—persuaded by General Robert Nivelle, one of those dapper imbeciles who have led that country's soldiers to defeat after defeat over the past 125 years—gambled upon a ferocious but inept attack on thickly fortified German positions in the province of Champagne. In 48 hours of fighting, the French gained 600 yards . . . and lost 100,000 killed and wounded.

This calamity shattered the French army. Officers began to record incidents of disaffection and outright disobedience. In late May, some 30,000 troops mutinied, defying orders to go over the top and pile their corpses up in no-man's-land. Dissension quickly spread to the rear. The despair that had felled the tsar appeared to be arriving in France. Nivelle was hastily sacked, and his replacement, Henri Pétain, restored order by sentencing 400 mutineers to death (only 50 of the sentences were in the end carried out) and promising his troops better food and living conditions. The French army didn't really recover, however, and it could be argued that it hasn't recovered yet.

The cloth-headed British general Sir Douglas Haig, meanwhile, was planning what would soon prove an even more dreadful failure: the campaign known to the history books as "Third Ypres" but that is usually remembered as Passchendaele. More than any other battle, more than the Somme or Verdun, where the casualties were greater, it is Passchendaele that shapes and colors the English-speaking world's collective memory of the First World War.

Haig dreamed of breaking through the German lines at their northernmost point, in western Belgium, and then ordering his cavalry to charge through the gap and wheel around and behind the German army. He imagined a strategic flanking victory that would forever gild his name as one of history's great commanders. The plan was foolish from the beginning. Even had Haig somehow "broken through," three and a half years of war had churned the below-sea-level ground of Flanders, the western flange of the Rhine river delta, into a great soupbowl of mud. The ridges that protruded above sea level were soaked every fall by torrential rains. It wasn't ground for a horse to charge over. It wasn't ground a man carrying a 60-pound pack could walk over.

Basil Liddel Hart, in his classic 1930 history of the war, put into circulation a possibly invented anecdote. A "highly placed officer from General Headquarters was on his first visit to the battle front—at the end of the four months' battle. Growing increasingly uneasy as the car approached the swamp-like edges of the battle area, he eventually burst into tears, crying, 'Good

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God, did we really send men to fight in that?' To which his companion replied that the ground was far worse ahead." The British writer Lyn Macdonald collected in the mid-1970s some 600 eyewitness accounts of the battle, which officially commenced on July 31 and sputtered out on November 10, and ultimately inflicted 250,000 dead and wounded on the British, Canadian, and Australian troops engaged in it. Her stories are the stuff of nightmares.

Listen to Major George Wade, an officer in the South Staffordshire Regiment.

> Going up to the line for the first time my first indication of the horrors to come appeared as a small lump on the side of the duckboard. I glanced at it, as I went past, and I saw to my horror that it was a human hand gripping the side of the track—no trace of the owner, just a glimpse of muddy wrist and a piece of sleeve sticking out of the mud. After that there were bodies every few yards. Some lying face down on the mud; others showing by the expressions fixed on their faces the sort of effort they had made to get back on the track.
>
> Sometimes you could actually see blood seeping up from underneath.

Or Sergeant John Berry of the Rifle Brigade:

> We heard screaming coming from another crater a bit away. I went over to investigate with a couple of the lads. It was a big hole and there was a fellow of the 8th Suffolks in it up to his shoulders. So I said, 'Get your rifles, one man in the middle to stretch them out, make a chain and let him get hold of it.' But it was no use. It was too far to stretch, we couldn't get any force on it, and the more we pulled and struggled the further he seemed to go down. He went down gradually. He kept begging us to shoot him. But we couldn't shoot him. Who could shoot him? We stayed with him, watching him go down in the mud.

Or Private Miles of the Royal Fusiliers:

> The moment you set off you felt that dreadful suction. It was forever pulling you down, and you could hear the sound of your feet coming out in a kind of 'plop' that seemed much louder at night when you were on your own. In a way, it was worse when the mud didn't suck you down; when it yielded under your feet you knew that it was a body you were treading on. It was terrifying. You'd tread on one on the stomach, perhaps, and it would grunt all the air out of its body. It made your hair stand on end. The smell could make you vomit.

In the end, of course, the Allies won the war. Contrary to the view one often hears that the First World War was "about nothing," the world is very much a better place because they did. Minus one genocidal demagogue, after all, the Germans' war aims in 1914-18 were very similar to their aims in 1939-45. But the Allied victory owed very little to the wanton slaughter on the battlefield and almost everything to the British and American naval blockade that ultimately did to the Germans what the Germans had hoped the submarine would do to Britain: starve them into surrender. Hundreds of thousands—perhaps millions—of Allied soldiers died wasted deaths because their generals were too blind to perceive the remorseless economics of "total war."

The survivors of the war on either side of the trenches, and the widows and orphans of those who did not survive, would never again fully trust the political authorities who waged the war. With considerable justification.The newest account of the battle of Passchendaele, published last year by Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, points out that the politicians who professed outrage at Haig's recklessness had every opportunity to prevent and then call off his futile attacks. They preferred to avert their eyes. So "as the rain fell on Flanders and thousands of Haig's soldiers prepared to struggle through the mud to their doom, the Prime Minister who was proclaiming the futility of this undertaking failed to raise a finger to stop it."

When it was all over, the war turned out to have killed not just millions of young men. It killed, or left terminally wounded, the idea that deference to authority can have any legitimate role in a modern society. The habit of deference, of course, went on to outlive its justifications by another half century or so. Its final disappearance, in the convulsions of the 1960s and 1970s, is another story. But since 1918 the argument that democracies need self-confident intellectual and aesthetic elites has been a losing one.

Curiously, the more we make our peace with the necessity of economic winners and losers as the price of a dynamic free-market economy, the more we seem to object to any other form of inequality. Elites hold on to their positions by denying that they exist, by denying even their right to exist, by taking the lead in the destruction of what few norms and standards remain. And the ruin is not yet complete.

Somewhere under the soil of northern France, an enormous mass of explosives lies waiting. The British dug 21 great tunnels under the German lines on Messines Ridge, and in June 1917 they packed them full of dynamite and set them off. The sound of the detonation, the loudest until then ever made by man, could be heard on the English coast. Two of the mines failed to explode. One was located and neutralized in 1969. The other, reports the English historian Martin Gilbert, still rusts underground, inspiring a certain nervousness in the residents of the vicinity. Intellectually and morally too, the explosive material left behind by the First World War lies ticking beneath our feet. ♦

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Oxford Blues

Sobran's Shakespeare Silliness

By Paul Cantor

It has always been difficult for ordinary mortals to cope with the genius of Shakespeare. How could anyone have come up with works of the magnitude of *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth* in the space of a few seasons writing for the London stage? Faced with such apparently superhuman creativity, many have groped for an explanation in the idea that the plays must have been written by someone other than the man born in Stratford in 1564 to whom they are traditionally credited. Two main objections are usually offered to this man's having authored the plays: 1) He seems to lack the education required to produce such profound works since he did not even have a college degree; 2) the Stratford man was a commoner, and the plays seem to be written by someone with intimate knowledge of the world of the nobility.

Joseph Sobran's *Alias Shakespeare* is the latest contribution to the debate over who authored Shakespeare's plays. It presents the by-now familiar theory that the plays were really written by Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford, who, as a nobleman and a graduate of Cambridge University, had the qualifications the man from Stratford lacked. Unfortunately, Sobran adds little if anything to the authorship debate; his book is not based on any original research and is simply derived from evidence others have advanced on behalf of Oxford. The vulgar and pretentious subtitle of the book—"Solving the Greatest Literary Mystery of All Time"—makes it sound much more original than it is. In fact, the most one can say for Sobran is that he gives a lucid summary of arguments others have developed (but which, alas, Shakespeare scholars have long since refuted).

Joseph Sobran
Alias Shakespeare:
Solving the Greatest Literary Mystery of All Time
Free Press, 311 pp., $25

The central problem with all attempts to ascribe Shakespeare's works to someone else is their promise that they will thereby make the creation of the plays more comprehensible. But does having a college degree really make it any more likely that someone could write *Hamlet*? There is something embarrassingly bourgeois about this way of thinking, as if some 12-step program were available that leads to literary achievement of the highest order. Some of Shakespeare's fellow playwrights, like Christopher Marlowe, did have university degrees, but the fact is that many of the greatest authors in history never set foot in college. Geniuses are geniuses precisely because they do not play by the ordinary rules.

Consider a modern case, where we know the facts. Thomas Mann's great novel, *Doctor Faustus*, is loosely based on the career of Arnold Schoenberg, the inventor of the twelve-tone method of musical composition. Reading this book, with its intricate and elaborate analyses of imaginary and real musical compositions, one would think that Mann must have had a Ph.D. in musicology from one of Europe's finest institutions. In fact, like Shakespeare, Mann never really got beyond a high-school education (he did take a few courses at various institutions of higher learning in Munich), and he was not professionally trained in music at all. Careful research has revealed that whenever Mann needed a technical musicological passage, he simply consulted his friends, who helped him find what he wanted in textbooks and other sources. His description of twelve-tone composition is, for example, copied almost verbatim from Theodor Adorno's *Philosophy of Modern Music*. The degree of specialized knowledge manifested in *Doctor Faustus* equals or surpasses anything in Shakespeare's plays, and yet in this case, where we can actually observe how Mann worked, we see that no formal education was required for him to give the impression of being extremely knowledgeable in an arcane field. He just had to find the right person from whom to plagiarize, as Shakespeare did with Plutarch.

Sobran makes a great deal of the fact that Shakespeare's works display detailed knowledge of Italy. We have no record of Shakespeare's having travelled to Italy, and the Earl of Oxford did make the journey. Aha! But much of the knowledge that

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Sobran claims could have been obtained only by visiting Italy was readily available to Shakespeare in books, such as Contarini's *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice*, and whatever other facts he needed he could have gleaned from conversations with fellow Londoners who had been there. Shakespeare displays just as intimate a knowledge of ancient Rome as he does of the Italy of his own day, and among the many capacities Sobran attributes to Oxford, time-travelling does not figure. The fact is that Shakespeare is able to convince us that he had been to Prospero's island in *The Tempest*, which does not even exist. That is what a great poet can do—embody his imaginary conceptions so concretely that they appear to be real, or, as Shakespeare himself put it, the poet "gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name."

Sobran's argument throughout is based on a fundamental misconception of the poetic process, especially as it was understood in the Renaissance. Thoroughly steeped in Romantic notions of poetry as self-expression, Sobran naively assumes that poets simply translate their personal experience into poetry. Thus he finds something mysterious about Shakespeare's sonnets: "they speak in an aging man's voice, while at the apparent time of their composition Mr. Shakespeare was only about thirty." Since Oxford was 14 years older than Shakespeare, he thus becomes in Sobran's eyes a better candidate for the authorship of the sonnets.

This is a good example of how anachronistic Sobran's thinking is. The average lifespan was a good deal shorter in the Elizabethan era than it is today. Thirty may seem young in 1997, but in the Elizabethan era, it seemed a lot older; considering the fact that Shakespeare actually died at fifty-two, by the time he was thirty, his life was more than half over.

More important, nothing in the history of literature suggests the slightest connection between a poet's chronological age and the "age" of the speaking voice in his poetry. Two of the most moving poetic expressions of the feelings of old age are "Ulysses" and "Tithonus," and yet Tennyson wrote these poems when he was only 24. Yeats sounds younger in the wildly experimental poems he wrote in the 1930s than he does in the dreamy, late Romantic poems he wrote in the 1890s. This is precisely what great poets are able to do: imagine themselves into situations other than their own.

Implacably literal-minded, Sobran time and again fails to check his speculations against the known facts of literary history. Developments in Shakespeare's career that he finds anomalous turn out to be a matter of course in the documented careers of other authors. Nowhere is this error more evident than in Sobran's treatment of Shakespeare's social status. To read Sobran, one would think that Shakespeare was the only commoner who ever wrote successfully about the aristocracy. In fact, the vast majority of authors throughout history have come from what we think of as the middle class. They generally stem from humble origins and indeed used writing as a means of bettering their condition. The aristocrat who is also a great author is the exception, not the rule (a Sir Philip Sidney, a Lord Byron, or a Count Tolstoy), and one can see why, when one reads Sobran's account of the Earl of Oxford's life.

How could anyone who led such a dissolute life find the time and discipline to write the plays we know as Shakespeare's? Sobran confuses living an aristocratic existence with being able to portray it. He writes of Oxford: "His life sounds more like the subject of a Shakespeare play." But could King Lear have written *King Lear* or Macbeth *Macbeth*? If literary history teaches us anything, it is that authors are usually the opposite of the heroes they create. Homer was no Achilles.

I wonder if Sobran realizes that his argument places him in the camp of today's multiculturalists, and that his book is simply a case of identity politics, Renaissance-style. Contemporary radicals insist that authors are merely the reflection of various ethnic, racial, gender, and class categories, which is why they say that the canon must be expanded to represent a diversity of viewpoints. Only a black can legitimately write about blacks, only a woman about women, only a Jew about Jews, and so on. Sobran's argument is a variant of this principle: Only an aristocrat could write sympathetically about aristocrats. I happen to agree with Sobran that Shakespeare's plays present an aristocratic view of the world, although I would add that Shakespeare was concerned with distinguishing the true aristocrat, the aristocrat by nature, from the false aristocrat, the aristocrat merely by convention, and thus he did not unthinkingly endorse the political arrangements of his day. In any case, unless one wishes to maintain that nobody could dispassionately or disinterestedly hold to aristocratic principles, I see no reason why Shakespeare had to be born into the aristocracy in order to admire it.

Sobran inadvertently offers some telling evidence against his own argument. Twice he makes a point of associating Shakespeare with Edmund Burke. Unfortunately for Sobran, Burke, the great spokesman for the English aristocracy and the age of chivalry, was thoroughly middle-class in origins, the son of an Irish Protestant lawyer. By the same token, in the appendix Sobran offers of Oxford's poems, the first turns out to express a remarkably bourgeois and anti-aristocratic spirit:

The labouring man that tills the fertile soil,
And reaps the harvest fruit, hath not indeed
The gain, but pain; and if for all his toil
He gets the straw, the lord will have the seed.

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I have no idea whether Oxford was a traitor to his class, but at least we see that in poetry he was capable of imagining how the other half lives and sympathizing with their plight. Incidentally, if this verse does not sound like the Shakespeare you know and love, be assured that none of Oxford's other poems does either.

Sobran sticks to a Marxist view of literature: Authors are the captives of the class into which they were born, and their works are merely the ideological superstructure of their class interest. Thus Sobran ends up presenting a completely conventional view of a completely conventional Shakespeare: "Shakespeare's philosophy is thoroughly feudal. He puts a premium on fealty and what used to be called 'knowing one's place.'" For all Sobran's claims to be revolutionizing the study of Shakespeare, to open "a door to a completely new understanding of the great plays and poems," when he comes to interpret individual works, he merely rehashes what undergraduates were being taught half a century ago: the good old Elizabethan World Picture approach associated with E.M.W. Tillyard.

In addition to its conceptual problems, *Alias Shakespeare* is badly written and badly organized. Sobran keeps repeating his points; nearly identical sentences appear at odd intervals throughout the text. Moreover, he has a habit of contradicting himself, sometimes on the same page. One of his arguments against Shakespeare's authorship is that "his death in 1616 apparently passed unnoticed in the city that adored the plays and poems bearing his name." Barely five lines later, Sobran writes: "The Elizabethans . . . weren't curious about authors." If the Elizabethans were not curious about authors, why is it strange that Shakespeare's death in Stratford failed to provoke any reaction in London? Once again, we see how anachronistic Sobran's thinking is. He is living in the world of media celebrity and *Entertainment Tonight*, but in 1616 there was no Renaissance equivalent of Leeza Gibbons to announce the death of the Swan of Avon to a stunned and saddened television audience in London.

Kevin Chadwick

The worst aspect of *Alias Shakespeare* is Sobran's incessant special pleading. He subjects Shakespeare to standards that he refuses to apply to the Earl of Oxford. For example, Sobran is obsessed with Shakespeare's will, which he considers important enough to reprint in an appendix. Sobran is made deeply suspicious by the fact that no signs of literary talent appear in this one bit of writing legally linked to Mr. William Shakespeare. The obvious answer to this profound conundrum is that Shakespeare's will was written by his lawyer, and we all know how much literary talent lawyers possess. Sobran himself has to admit this possibility, but he cannily tries to turn it in his favor: "It may have been composed by his lawyer, Francis Collins; and this doubt of [Shakespeare's] authorship calls his very literacy into question." I hope Sobran will believe me when I tell him that I have a Ph.D. in English from Harvard University, but when it came to writing my will, I had a lawyer do it; that is what lawyers are for.

In the case of Shakespeare's will, Sobran simply loses sight of the genre he is dealing with: "It is difficult to imagine the great poet writing a document of more than 1300 words without leaving a single recognizable touch of his literary personality, distinctive expression, or sheer verbal energy." If Sobran is going to make this claim, the ordinary canons of evidence dictate that he show that Elizabethan wills were commonly something other than conventional legal documents. He needs to show that other Elizabethan authors left their personal stamp upon their testaments. I want to see that Edmund Spenser's will is written in archaic diction and Spenserian stanzas; I want to see the iambic pentameters in Marlowe's life-insurance policy.

By contrast, when Sobran goes through the Earl's correspondence to show that he often used the same words as Shakespeare, he pauses: "It

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may still be objected that Oxford's letters, however congruent with Shakespeare's vocabulary, show nothing that we can call genius. But this is to misconceive genius as a source of unremitting inspiration, like a powerful electric current that can never be turned off." If Oxford's genius could be turned off in his letters, why could not Shakespeare's be turned off in his will, especially if he was virtually on his deathbed when it was composed?

I will not even go into Sobran's attempt to use Shakespeare's bad handwriting in his surviving signatures as evidence that he could not have been a writer; I thought Mel Brooks had disposed of that issue years ago in one of his 2,000-Year-Old Man routines. ("Did you see the originals, the first folios? I saw them, do you wanna know what they were? They were blots of ink, an m that didn't look like an m, an o that looked like a p, every letter was cockeyed and crazy. Don't tell me he was a great writer, he had the worst penmanship I ever saw in my life!")

The most significant fact in this whole controversy is that none of Shakespeare's contemporaries ever raised a single doubt concerning his authorship of the plays; indeed, nobody seriously challenged his having written them until well into the 19th century. And most of the advocates of alternative candidates have had an axe to grind.

The first champion of Francis Bacon's authorship of Shakespeare's plays was curiously named Delia Bacon. And the most active promoter today of de Vere's claims is the current Earl of Oxford. As for the mystery of how anyone managed to write the works of Shakespeare, I am afraid that we will have to go on living with that. The plays encompass such a wide range of emotions, thoughts, and deeds that the idea of ever finding one man who was qualified in terms of personal experience to have written all of them is chimerical. ♦

THE TERRIBLE BEAUTY OF W.B. YEATS

The Price Poetry Has Paid for a Giant Without Conviction

By Christopher Caldwell

The late critic Richard Ellmann thought William Butler Yeats the most important poet to have written in English since Wordsworth. Ellmann also admitted that, had Yeats died in 1917 and not in 1939, "he would have been remembered as a remarkable minor poet who achieved a diction more powerful than that of his contemporaries but who, except in a handful of poems, did not have much to say with it." So Oxford historian R.F. Foster has quite a task to fulfill in the first of a planned two-volume biography of Yeats, because Volume One only takes us up through 1914, before Yeats really hit his stride.

R.F. Foster
W.B. Yeats
The Apprentice Mage, 1865-1914
Oxford, 640 pp., $35

Foster would agree that Yeats's major poems were still to come—but Yeats was more than a poet. He was the most ambitious and active member of modern Ireland's first generation, and his role in founding Ireland's cultural institutions arguably had consequences as profound as did his poetry. "Most biographic studies of WBY are principally about what he wrote," Foster admits. "This one is principally about what he did." It is a wholly defensible endeavor—and one that Foster pulls off with depth and panache.

At the heart of Foster's biography is Yeats's lifelong involvement with the occult. It gives shape to the whole narrative and has implications for Yeats's politics and character. From his early enthusiasm for Irish folklore to the bizarre "system" of cycles he would write about in *A Vision* in 1925, Yeats was consumed with the idea that powerful forces beyond our comprehension were controlling the course of history. He went from talking about leprechauns and banshees in the period covered by this volume to the idea of a "rough beast" out of his own mystical imagining that was about to take over Western civilization.

Foster sees Yeats's obsession with the occult as largely a source of metaphors for his poetry. If so, then this volume gives one a sense of the price that Yeats paid in a wanton search for poetic inspiration.

Born outside Dublin in 1865, a poor student who lacked the classics or math to get into Dublin's Trinity College, Yeats arrived in London in the late 1880s and immediately sought out Madame Blavatsky, Europe's leading clairvoyant, whose "theosophist" empire had been exposed as a fraud by a freelance investigator only months before. Yeats also joined a more radical supernaturalist group called the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and researched in cabalism, black magic, Rosicrucianism, and a variety of Eastern religions he only vaguely understood. Even in 1912, at 47, Yeats was consulting with Etta Wriedt, an American medium who introduced him to "Leo Africanus," the shade of a 16th-century Spanish Arab explorer Yeats would come to see as his alter ego.

We are thus almost immediately at

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a central issue of Yeats's poetry: Did he actually believe any of this nonsense? Yeats was asked the question constantly, of course, and succeeded in evading it by citing Socrates' words in Plato's *Phaedrus*: "I want to know not about this but about myself." Why, then, was the system he wrote about in *A Vision* based on images his wife saw during bouts of automatic writing? What are we to think of a poet who loudly proclaims his disaffection with established religion and instead bases his metaphysics on quite literally the first thing that comes into his, or his wife's, head?

That question is best answered by examining Yeats's youthful subject matter: Ireland itself. "Mad Ireland hurt [him] into poetry," Auden said, but in truth, the vein of poetry into which Ireland "hurt" Yeats was not a particularly rich one. His first major dramatic poem, *The Wanderings of Oisin* (1889), was "an azure-and-gold tonal arrangement of islands, caverns, basaltic castles, painted birds, milky smoke and grass-blades hung with dewdrops," as Foster describes it. Yeats was clearly keen to write in the folkloric mode. He took an early interest in Irish tales during his childhood summers in County Sligo, but according to his sister Lily there was something bogus, too, in his notion that Sligo people believed in fairies and talked about them all the time. ("So they did, of course. To *children*.")

Yeats assembled the Irish elements in his poems as if he were a professional folklorist, and exploited them as expertly as a mau-mauing modern-day ethnic novelist. There was a ferocious canniness in his business practices at odds with the disarming rusticity of his poems. He was ruthless in dunning subscribers to his poems. And, in setting up a favorable review of his early novel *John Sherman*, Yeats wrote his confidante Katharine Tynan, "You might perhaps, if you think it is so, say that Sherman is an Irish type. I have an ambition to be taken as an Irish novelist not as an English or cosmopolitan one choosing Ireland as a background."

Foster even sees "something curiously self-conscious in his immediate idealization of" Maud Gonne, the English political agitator who came to visit Yeats in 1889. Although Yeats would not have his first love affair until age 29, and would not marry until age 52, the "*fin-de-siècle* beauty," as Foster calls Gonne, was the love of Yeats's life. (Until about twenty years ago, this love was thought to have been unrequited, but Foster adds his voice to the growing consensus that the two slept together sometime in late 1908.) Yeats's delicate and allusive love poems to Gonne are the writings of the period that stand up best against his later work, indeed against any love lyrics in the language. The emotions of love were something not even Yeats could completely smother under a contrived value system—although he tried.

Foster gives us a considerably more nuanced view of what it means to be a mystic, a holy man, a seer in modern times than Yeats biographers before him. He shows that Yeats was as much a striver as a seeker—that the poet cannot be understood except as a man on the make, in pursuit of fame, love, and revelation. This is where Foster's focus on "what he did" rather than "what he wrote" is most appropriate, for it is to that very side of his personality that 20th-century Ireland owes most of its literary institutions.

Yeats launched both the Irish Literary Society of London and the National Literary Society in Dublin, spending a good deal more time tending to the former than to the latter. But it was in 1904, when he established the Abbey Theatre, that Yeats not only changed the cultural face of the country but transformed himself into a genuine national leader.

In 1907 the Abbey produced John Millington Synge's masterpiece *The Playboy of the Western World*. It caused a sensation, in part because of descriptions of women that were considered pornographic. Riots broke out on opening night. Yeats returned from a lecture tour to announce that "so far as he could see the people who formed the opposition had no books in their houses."

The rioters were Catholic; Yeats was a Protestant. What Catholic nationalists saw as a striving for common values and a fear of the wages of immorality, the Protestant Yeats saw as mob psychology and rank philistinism. The *Playboy* conflict drew Yeats into real politics and away from the romantic pose of his early folkloric nationalism. The spiritual *raison d'être* of the modern Irish state—Irish Catholic fears both of persecution and the condescension to which Yeats was given—left him in the uncomfortable position of professing Irish nationalism while being wholly out of sympathy with the myths that gave rise to it. "This endless war with Irish stupidity," he wrote to Tynan, "gets on my nerves." In essence, Yeats was seeking to carve out a place for himself and other Protestants in a country that no longer particularly wanted them.

What is romantic when applied to leprechauns is dangerous when applied to religious and ethnic strife, and Yeats's mystical flights led him to a view of history that didn't correspond to anything he *thought* he was writing about, and which was racist to the extent that it did. Yeats supported Ireland's abortive "Blue Shirt" movement of 1933, and critics have long believed that his mystical nationalism drew him close to fascism. As Conor Cruise O'Brien has put it, "Yeats the man was as near to being a Fascist as his situation and the conditions of his own country permitted." Exhibit A for this claim is Yeats's poem of the early 1930s "Blood and the Moon":

Blessed be this place,
More blessed still the tower;
A bloody, arrogant power
Rose out of the race . . .

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But the sentiment was already present even in such poems as his 1922 "The Fisherman":

All day I'd looked in the face
What I had hoped 'twould be
To write for my own race
And the reality . . .

Had this been written by a German, it would make us shudder. But "The Fisherman" doesn't because it is such a strange kind of poem: racial bragging that relies on the continued subjection and fecklessness of the race in question. Yeats chose to identify himself with the Irish peasantry in order to hold a moral high ground—the supposed high ground of the Irish nationalist victim—that would otherwise be indefensible. Which is merely another way of saying that Yeats was the first poet of identity politics.

Three years after Yeats's death, the critic Randall Jarrell wrote: "When people who admire Yeats's poetry ridicule or deplore his 'crazy system,' they do not realize that it was the system which enabled him to produce the poetry. . . . However wrong that system is for you and me, it was magnificently right for Yeats: it made his last poetry the fulfillment of his whole life, it made him write about our times as no other poet has."

Jarrell is right that Yeats's "crazy" system was "magnificently right" for him, and this is as true of Yeats's political poems as it is of his mystical ones. He turned out poetry of a raw, new beauty, and Ellmann's estimation of Yeats as the most important poet since Wordsworth is a fair one. But does it matter whether the systems that spawned Yeats's poetry were violent or dishonest, or whether he believed in any of them at all?

Yeats used to say that a poet should be able "to say he believes in marriage in the morning, and that he does not in the evening." To the extent that he is merely guarding himself against those who would read a poem as if it were a political manifesto, that view deserves to be defended. But it can't be ignored that Yeats's poetic vision was dangerously nihilistic in some respects, leading him into a cul-de-sac of fascism and paganism. He was one of many poets of the time—Pound, Rilke, and Eliot among them—who wound up fashioning beautiful poetry at the expense of poetry itself.

Sometimes he made his poetry dependent on an ideology that would make it too hot for future generations of poets to handle; sometimes he contrived a poetic voice that (as in much of the work Foster focuses on in this first volume) seems almost willfully fraudulent. Either way, poetry, always a fragile art, was unlikely to long survive having such additional burdens placed on it.

As, indeed, it has not. ♦

THE AMERICAN DUKE

Garry Wills Deconstructs John Wayne

By Michael Brus

Garry Wills, who has pumped out books on the Kennedys, Reagan, Lincoln, and others, has now produced a "political biography" of John Wayne, a curious undertaking. It smells like a set-up: The qualities that Wayne embodied, Wills has made a career of scorning.

And scorn he does, though not always unjustly. Wills shows that much of Wayne's public behavior was compensation for private failings. The actor's refusal to enlist during World War II, for example, led to a kind of penance afterward, when he practiced McCarthyite politics and made ideologically charged movies. And his confused sense of manhood led him to submit to the cruelties of tyrannical director John Ford. But Wills's insights are buried under heaps of biographical and cinematic trivia and interrupted by windy excursions into mythological analysis. His conclusion—that Wayne, for good or ill, represents the dynamism of the American frontier—is disappointingly banal.

Garry Wills
John Wayne's America:
The Politics of Celebrity
Simon & Schuster, 384 pp., $26

John Wayne got off to a slow start. According to legend, he was lifting boxes on the Fox lot in 1929 when a director thought he "moved well." When the Depression hit, Wayne spent a tedious decade making low-budget serials. He attracted notice in 1939 with *Stagecoach*, his first film with Ford, in which he dazzled as The Ringo Kid. When the war broke out, Wayne recognized the opportunity of a lifetime—as Wills notes, Wayne was "at the peak of his physical attractiveness, and the need for male stars was increasing as those in Wayne's age bracket went off to some form of military service."

Wayne was 34 years old in 1941, with four children. Many of his peers signed up to fight: Clark Gable (40 years old), Tyrone Power (28), Henry Fonda (36), Robert Montgomery (37), and Jimmy Stewart (33). While they were serving, Wayne made three films with Marlene Dietrich and wrecked his family with a high-profile affair with the actress Esperanza Bauer. He wrote to Ford that he could not fill out the proper military

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forms because he had no typewriter on location, and also that his wife, from whom he was not yet divorced, would not allow him to retrieve necessary documents from home. "In short," Wills quips, "the dog ate his homework."

Wayne's decision contrasts with that of Ronald Reagan, who at 32 was also coming off a breakthrough performance after years in B-movies. "Reagan did not serve abroad because he was practically blind without his contact lenses," Wills writes. "But his military film work for the Signal Corps kept him from commercial movie making and definitely hurt his career." After the war, Reagan's film career dwindled while Wayne's took off. Wayne's wartime flicks with Dietrich were not important in themselves, but he knew that they provided the credentials needed to make it big: In 1948, he became a superstar with *Red River*. The next year, it was *Sands of Iwo Jima*, in which he played the valorous Sergeant Stryker. "From then on," Wills writes, "the man who evaded World War II service would be the symbolic man who won World War II." Newt Gingrich calls *Sands* "the formative movie of my life" and copied Stryker's walk. Pat Buchanan adopted his battle cries—"Lock and load!," "Saddle up!"—and so does a psychopathic sergeant in Oliver Stone's *Platoon*.

Around the time of *Sands*, Wayne decided to lend himself to the anti-Communist cause, becoming president of the conservative Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals. Yet by that time, 1949, Wills argues, Wayne's new cause had already been won. The "Hollywood Ten" had been brought before the House Committee on Un-American Activities two years before, and Congress had been investigating film-community Reds since 1939. "Wayne," Wills writes, "entered the ideological wars as he did World War II—retrospectively, and with compensatory bravado."

A string of ideological films put this bravado on display. In 1952, Wayne played a HUAC bloodhound in *Big Jim McLain*. In 1960, he targeted candidate John Kennedy in an advertisement for *The Alamo*: "There were no ghostwriters at the Alamo," Wayne mocked, while the movie's publicist said that true patriots would never criticize the film. And in 1968, Wayne played a swaggering Vietnam commando in *The Green Berets*.

Kent Lemon

The ideological purposes behind these films are magnified by their awfulness. *Big Jim McLain*, for example, looks like an episode of *Dragnet* filmed with plastic palm trees; and in case the audience is nostalgic for World War II, there is the casting of venal Japanese as the Communists. *The Green Berets*, in addition to being racist, borders on camp—Wayne looks geriatric, the VC cower under evergreen trees (the filming was done at Fort Benning, Georgia), and the soldiers seem more concerned about shooting down liberal straw men than about real fighting. "There's something called due process," an idealistic newspaper correspondent whines to Wayne. "Well, out here, due process is a bullet," Wayne sneers. (Take that, Mr. Halberstam.)

Though Wayne often descended into caricature, there was one director who could almost always get him to act—Ford. And Ford got not only acting out of Wayne, but heart, body, and soul. "Wayne's father was a dreamy nonachiever," Wills writes, "and Wayne idolized John Ford, a hard taskmaster and ruthless professional." So, Wayne got a father figure, and Ford got a strapping son to beat. Ford could be brutal to his actors, and he especially loved to pick at Wayne's sores. While filming his World War II paean *They Were Expendable* (1945), Ford yelled, "Duke, can't you manage a salute that at least looks like you've been in the service?" It was the only time Wayne ever walked off a set.

Wills argues that the director's "tough love" produced great westerns precisely because such love is the touchstone of the western hero. The western hero is individualistic, unsettled, and violent when necessary, but not, Wills notes, a thug. In other words, he is something like Ford was with Wayne, and like Wayne was on camera. In *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), for instance, Wayne shoots the last outlaw, then surrenders his vigilante power to the town's idealistic but wimpy sheriff (played by Jimmy Stewart). In *The Searchers* (1956), Wayne is enraged at his niece, who has "gone Injun," but, having finally cornered her, he reins in his hatred: He lifts her over his head menacingly, but then cradles her, saying, "Let's go home."

John Wayne's America would make an interesting essay on how off-screen behavior influenced some of Hollywood's best, and worst, films.

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As a book, however, it is turgid and directionless. For one thing, Wills's obsession with the deconstruction of American icons leads him on tangents. Do we really need dozens of pages on how Wayne's *Alamo* differs from the real battle? To appreciate *Sands*, must we be dragged through a treatise on the Marines' manipulation of the Mount Suribachi flag-raising? Most readers can grasp that the movie's flag-raising is a dramatization and realize that Wayne's purpose is to glorify a patriotic ideal, not to recreate a specific historical moment.

Tedious, too, is Wills's film criticism, which includes 20 pages on *Stagecoach*, complete with diagrams of seating arrangements on the coach. There is also the question of posture: "Wayne constantly strikes the pose of Michelangelo's David (see Figures 8a and 8b). Sometimes, with a wider throw of the hip, he becomes Donatello's David (see Figures 9a and 9b)." Not only that, but the Duke's "physical autonomy and self-command, the ease and authority of his carriage, made each motion a statement of individualism, a balletic Declaration of Independence." Read on, and Wills will inform you that, until he, Wills, came along, Wayne had "largely escaped such metaphysical attention."

You're telling me. Sadly, Wills's metaphysical musings don't say much. He ends with an 11-page "Conclusion," 9 pages of which are devoted to rambles about Emerson, Romulus, Ovid, Dreiser, Constantine, Henry Adams, and others before Wayne makes an appearance. And then Wills concludes that Wayne "embodies the American myth," the "American Adam—untrammeled, unspoiled, free to roam, and breathing a larger air than the cramped men behind desks. He is the avatar of the hero in that genre that best combines mythic ideas about American exceptionalism."

Which is unexceptional and anticlimactic, leaving this odd book with little reason for being. ♦

WAGNER, FOR GOOD AND ILL

The Met's All-Star "Ring"

By Jay Nordlinger

Of all the world's opera companies, only New York's Met has the stature to summon to its stage the finest, most appropriate singers for any work in the repertory and present them in a kind of all-star performance. When these well-laid plans succeed, the results are not only glorious but historic. When they do not (as they often do not), the results are all the more disappointing for the opportunity that has been squandered. And you never know—no matter how glittering the cast—what you are in for until the curtain and the baton both rise.

The Metropolitan Opera is currently staging Richard Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelung*—always a wildly ambitious undertaking because of the arduousness of its roles, the paucity of conductors who are equipped for it, and the sheer size of the thing. The *Ring* comprises four separate, full-length operas about the decline and fall of the Norse gods that demand not only exhausting performances but imaginative stage effects. A company that can do it even passably is remarkable.

On April 7, the Met delivered a performance of the second opera in the cycle, *Die Walküre*, the best loved of the four and the apotheosis of everything that Wagner sought to achieve. The performance suggested both the strength and the weakness of the Met's all-star strategy; it was, by turns, extraordinary and deeply flawed.

Plácido Domingo, the production's Siegmund, had one of the banner nights of his career. Domingo is a frustratingly uneven singer, but for a couple of hours he was firing on all cylinders, blazing through the role rather than doggedly assaying it. It is startling to hear, in the first sung notes of *Die Walküre*, those Italianate sounds coming out of Siegmund's mouth—lush and liquid, instead of stentorian and forced. Domingo's intonation was spot-on, as he traveled repeatedly to the center of the notes, rather than fishing around for them, as he is wont to do on his lazier, or less comfortable, nights. He sang with deep understanding and acted convincingly, too. This was genuine acting, not "opera acting," which is so much hammy pantomime. Famous as a lyric-dramatic tenor, suited to Puccini and Verdi, Domingo has, in his mid-50s, become the leading Wagnerian tenor of his time.

When he reached Siegmund's pivotal moments of Act I—the "Spring" aria, the hurled oaths as he pulls the sword of Wotan, king of the gods, from the tree—you felt something that you seldom feel in the opera house or the concert hall: that you were witnessing something indeed historic, that future generations would envy you for having been there.

Domingo was partnered in this act by Deborah Voigt, who is increasingly the soprano in demand for the more lyrical Wagner roles. Like Domingo, she is an unusual Wagnerian in that she produces a huge yet creamy sound. She has no need to sacrifice power for beauty, or to skimp on beauty for power. It is no trade-off for her, as it must be for most of her peers. And like Domin-

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go, she sang intelligently, fashioning lovely phrasing in long arcs of sound.

This was Golden Age stuff—a reminder that not all greatness lies in the past, that not all the best performances are contained on crackly old recordings adorned with sepia photographs. The mythic Kirsten Flagstad and Lauritz Melchior had nothing on this pair, and any listener unsentimental about the past knew it. Domingo's and Voigt's bodies might not have matched—the virile Spaniard and the pasty Chicagoan played twins—but their voices did, and one could not have imagined a more superbly sung Act I. When the curtain fell, the orchestra members, ordinarily a jaded, unionized lot, did not file out for a smoke. Instead, they applauded in astonishment like everyone else.

The second act was preceded by the appearance onstage of the Met's general manager, Joseph Volpe. Audiences always dread the sight of such officials, because it usually means a cancellation and a substitution, and indeed Volpe had an announcement about that evening's Brünnhilde. "Hildegard Behrens is suffering from a bout of allergies." Groans and curses. "But she has agreed to go on and asks for your understanding." Wild cheers and sighs of relief.

With her first cry of the legendary "Hojotoho," however, it was clear that Behrens had done a disservice by going on—or that the Met brass had done the disservice by pressing her to do so. When she is healthy, Behrens is a classic Wagnerian soprano, which is to say that the chief merit of her voice is its ability to withstand Wagner's rigors. But, beset by her ailment, Behrens was weak and quavering, croaking like an infirm old lady instead of soaring like Wotan's favorite daughter. Her lower register was practically inaudible, and her upper register—in this notoriously punishing and risky role—was a crapshoot. Still, Behrens is a true singing actress, and even at 60 she makes a believable Brünnhilde, part of why she is the marquee attraction of the Met's *Ring*.

Though Behrens, by performing under such conditions, was asking for the audience's understanding, she might have had its resentment, too, because she marred the opera by failing to give way to a soprano who at least could have executed the part, unlike the world's most sought-after Brünnhilde on a night when she should have rested her voice. Here, then, is a proposed rule, tradition-defying though it may be: Singers who have to be apologized for in advance should not go on, and if they are ill and choose to perform anyway, they should skip the sympathy pitch from the general manager.

REVIEWERS HABITUALLY FORGET THE INDISPENSABLE MAN—THE ONE ON THE PODIUM. SO RELIABLE IS JAMES LEVINE THAT HE IS TAKEN FOR GRANTED.

No one ever looked more like Wotan, with his ash-tree spear, Moshe Dayan patch, and god-like stride, than James Morris. And Morris owns this role on the world's stages to an even greater extent than Behrens owns hers. But he was ragged and unmusical throughout and gave a horrendous account of the opera's most sublime moment—the "Farewell," in which Wotan puts his daughter to sleep and calls for a circle of fire to protect her. Morris's mediocrity was both surprising and decisively damaging, as the last two thirds of *Die Walküre* fall principally on Wotan's and Brünnhilde's shoulders.

Reviewers of operatic performances habitually, and inexplicably, forget the indispensable man—the one on the podium. So reliable is James Levine that he has come to be taken for granted. The worthiness of this *Walküre* was assured—regardless of the fates of the throats—by his leadership of it. No Wagner opera has a chance without a masterly hand over the entire, sprawling enterprise, and there is no better conductor of Wagner than Levine—and no better conductor, period.

Strange, then, that Levine has decided to spend his career in the opera pit. The time-honored pattern of conductors is to begin with opera but then to graduate to a symphonic podium. At 53, he has already spent 25 years with the Met and seems bound to spend 25 more.

Levine has never received the credit he is due, and he is outright contemned by some. Maybe it is his ties to opera, or maybe—and this is something you do not hear in public every day—it is that he is a fat, perspiring, bushy-haired Jew from Cincinnati who does not cut the figure that many, particularly in Europe, seem to seek in a conductor. Levine will surely be recognized as the giant he is as soon as he is safely dead, or elderly, and his recordings are deemed definitive.

The hype and kitsch that surround every production of the *Ring* cannot obscure the shocking wonder of it when it is seen and heard. (In the Met gift shop, *Ring*-heads may purchase Valkyrie hats, Rhine-maiden towels, and Siegfried's-sword letter-openers.) In the end, one can say only what Sieglinde says as Brünnhilde sends her into the woods, to play out her destiny: "O miracle past understanding!" Wagner obviously, in his long and often despicable life, listened to devils, but, equally obviously, he listened to angels, too—which is why Theodor Herzl began his Zionist conferences with the playing of Wagner by a hired orchestra. This music, like the events of the *Ring*, is beyond time, beyond place, beyond everything but the capacity to stir sluggish souls. ♦

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Gingrich to Pay Penalty with Dole Loan

—*Washington Post* headline, April 18, 1997

Parody

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2. Too high	**82%**
3. Don't know	**6%**

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3. Don't know	**6%**

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A. Supported a 50% cut in the access charge that is currently on your long distance phone bill

1. More likely	**67%**
2. Less likely	**8%**
3. Makes no difference	**24%**
4. Don't know	**2%**

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1. More likely	**22%**
2. Less likely	**52%**
3. Makes no difference	**24%**
4. Don't know	**2%**

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